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THE TITLE MONGERS:  
~ WILLIAM FARQUHAR PAYSON ~



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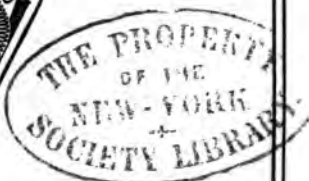
# THE TITLE-MONGERS





# THE TITLE-MONGERS

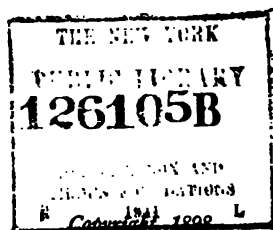
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WILLIAM FARQUHAR PAYSON  
Author of "The Copymaker"



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# The Title-Mongers



## CHAPTER I

HERR KRAUBER

THE Countess Duval was a worldly-wise woman, possessed of a soft smile and a hard heart, sharp wits and a sharper tongue. She was a maker and breaker of matrimonial matches, and, above all, a giver of excellent dinners. She lived in a well-furnished Parisian apartment on the Avenue Kleber, near the Place de l'Étoile and the Arc de Triomphe. In these luxurious rooms the Countess Duval gave one of her epicurean banquets on a pleasant evening early in April.

And this repast was the scene of the origin of a bold idea,—a very bold idea.

The Marquis Montrecourt, Monsieur Rolierre, and Herr Krauber were among the convivial diners.

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That the Marquis Montrecourt possessed a title is evident, and that with its aid he had acquired a goodly number of ever-accumulating debts may be readily surmised. But it is well further to know that the Marquis Montrecourt, at earlier stages in his career, had not been the occupant of so impoverished a position as at present; indeed, there had been days, not so long gone by, when he had spent his fifty or sixty thousand francs a year without living beyond the interest on his late father's conservative investments. Since then, however, he had made his own investments, growing less and less conservative, until he had become a ruined gambler, an *habitué* of the race-track, a drainer of the dregs of roulette, baccarat, constantly intoxicated with gaining, and tottering downward in this most demoralising passion, a miserable loser.

And yet no poverty, misery, or excessive immorality showed themselves in the Marquis Montrecourt that evening, as he sat sipping his wine from his glass and listening to the wit of the women at his side, perhaps with a slight preference for

the wine. For, to look at his face, — a face of countless expressions always entirely under control, expressions of deep feeling or utter nonchalance, of intense enthusiasm or ennui, of hard, stern, masculine formality, or of tender, almost feminine grace, expressions ever kaleidoscopically changing to please moods and surroundings, and so blinding the eye of an observer by their constant contradictions as to obscure from view their motive-power, the true nature underlying them, — to observe all these, noticing that no tell-tale marks of dissipation marred his surpassingly handsome face, was to characterise the marquis as a wonderful man; wonderful, too, for having preserved his good looks, the lustre to his deep, powerful eyes, after his mad, wild race; wonderful for having maintained his social position after the departure of his fortunes. The secret of this maintenance lay in the Marquis Montrecourt's external perfection. Of the art known as "keeping up appearances" under very adverse circumstances there are many students and innumerable critics, but few masters for



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long. The Marquis Montrecourt was one of these few masters. It mattered not how hard he was pressed by creditors, it mattered not how deep he had fallen into the slough of debt, he never lost his immaculacy. A certain creditor (for various reasons the most lenient of them all), in a moment of ill-concealed vexation at sight of Montrecourt's prosperous bearing, had once exclaimed: "By the heavens, Montrecourt, even were you reduced to mendicancy, even had you to beg from passers-by on the Bois, I'll wager you'd hold out a well-gloved hand!"

This creditor was Herr Krauber, a man owning much money, accumulated by himself, with a growing social position (given to him *sub rosa* by grateful acquaintances in exchange for loans), and with impishly bright, sharp eyes set deep in a little round head bereft of hair, but not of ideas. Indeed, it was in this spherical abode of many fearful and wonderful schemes that *The Idea* originated.

Monsieur Rolierre was an ordinary Frenchman whose character cannot suffer loss by not being described, as it had been

lost long ago, thanks to the accurate descriptions of those who first came into contact with it. Monsieur Rolierre had some characteristics, but no character; he therefore subsequently (as will be seen) aided in the progression of the bold idea.

The ceaseless chatter of the guests was as spicily flavoured as the dishes, the good name and fair fame of many an absent acquaintance being disposed of with as much avidity as the champagne. For the Countess Duval had as choice a collection of scandals on her tongue as of wines on her table, both equally palatable, the wines being very old, the scandals very new.

The countess searched for news in the conversation buzzing around her. Herr Krauber, at her right, never had any to disseminate, so she ignored him without his knowing it. Monsieur Rolierre, at her left, promulgated only platitudes and personalities sprinkled with stale sugar, so she left him to the young girl at his side to whom the platitudes and sugar might seem fresh. Montrecourt appeared to be much interested in the vivacious little

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Madame La Vie, so the Countess Duval frowned under her smiles.

At last, having vainly searched for tit-bits of gossip, the hostess did the next best thing after listening to news, — she *told* news.

“By the way, Jeannette,” she called to Madame La Vie, “do you remember Henri Duval, my son, whom the old man, I mean my late husband, disowned ten or twelve years ago, much against my wishes?”

Madame La Vie looked retrospective. “Of course,” she answered. “He started around the world with barely a sou.”

“Yes,” returned the countess.

“Ah, yes!” put in several, seeming highly interested, even including Herr Krauber, whose expressions were as scarce as his virtues.

“Doubtless you remember that Henri was my favourite, but not his father’s. I used to declare that he had a bright future, but Duval to his dying day would answer, ‘But not a bright past, my dear, nor a dazzling present.’”

Madame La Vie smiled, and Rolierre

laughed; Montrecourt feigned sorrow at thought of the father's heartlessness, and the German, who modelled his expressions after those about him, looking from one to another and finding the faces indicative of varied emotions, looked bland. Blandness was Krauber's last resort.

"But I was right," continued the Countess Duval. "What do you think Henri is up to?"

No one thought. So —

"He's to marry a Miss Crœsus," declared the hostess.

"Who? Where?" queried Madame La Vie, in half a breath.

"A letter came from him yesterday," went on the countess, with pride, — "the first since he left. Her name is — I forget — I never heard it before. But she's a Miss Crœsus, nevertheless. She has an income — mind you, an *income* — of two or three million francs. He says she's one of the richest girls in America."

Herr Krauber's jaw fell. "Two or three million francs!" he ejaculated, dropping his jaw further at each syllable, as though lending aid to his ears in grasping

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a conception of the income's enormity, and finally closing his mouth and eyes simultaneously as if to digest the conception stomachically as well as mentally. He had an inveterate habit of doing this,— of showing his appreciation for good news, or a good story, by smacking his lips and snapping his jaws, as if the information were food for the inner man, besides being food for thought. "Two million francs!"

"I am not surprised," observed Madame La Vie, still retrospecting and now a trifle rapturously. "Henri was a handsome boy. *Mon Dieu!* What a man he must be!"

"And then he has a title," remarked Rolierre, knowingly. "I'm told that noble-men are pedestalled in America,— enshrined and worshipped by the women. Riches and beauty are showered upon them. Isn't it so? That's what I've heard." Rolierre seldom made statements upon his own authority; they were re-tailed at second-hand, for he had neither originality nor energy, and always terminated his observations with an apologetic,

"At least I've heard so," or an irresponsible, "So I'm told."

Another guest declared that he had heard many similar reports, and Krauber's small eyes shone full upon Montrecourt. Just then the Idea originated! Krauber was much quicker financially than socially. Behind those ferret's eyes the thoughts now hurried one after another somewhat in this wise: "Montrecourt is handsome, the most magnetic man in Paris, perhaps. I'm no judge, but so say the women. The most magnetic and dangerous, if he chooses to be. Henri Duval (how well I remember him) is a count with good looks, with never a sou. Montrecourt is a marquis in the same condition,—a step higher in rank, appearance, and knowledge of the world. (The Idea was slowly maturing.) If the *Count* Duval obtains a pedestal, the *Marquis* Montrecourt should obtain a higher pedestal. If Duval wins two millions, Montrecourt should win four,—a four-million-francs' income! I wonder if he would play the game. It would be more interesting than roulette or rouge-et-noir,

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and more favourable. The banker would be more lenient than an ordinary croupier. *I* would be the banker. The bank always wins. *C'est bien !*"

For a few minutes, as the Marquis Montrecourt went alone to his home that night, he did not appear as the gay diner or *bon vivant*, for he walked with a stoop and no energy, as though the weight of his debts were already bending him, as though he were nearing the end of his life's road and the Avenue Kleber together. He thought of the great sum of money he owed Krauber, wondering by what miracle it could be paid. But suddenly, on passing an acquaintance in the street, lo! instantly he was again the *bon vivant*, immaculate Montrecourt!

As Herr Krauber went homeward with Rolierre, he made haste instead of ambling. He looked excited, alert, shrewd. The little eyes were more than ever ferrety. He thought many times of the money due him from Montrecourt, and, like the marquis, he wondered by what miracle it could be paid. Then he smiled as he concluded that he might work the

miracle himself. "Noblemen are pedes-  
talled there," thought he, "and marry  
fortunes. If Duval wins two, Montrecourt  
can win four."

Just then the Idea matured.

"You seem unusually anxious to go  
home," observed Rolierre. "What are  
you thinking of?"

"That I had too much Vin Brut," re-  
turned Krauber, falling into his usual  
amble.

"Or too much Madame La Vie?"  
queried Rolierre.

"Perhaps both; they affect me simi-  
larly," answered the German, carelessly,  
but he was still thinking of Montrecourt,  
the debt, and the Idea.



## CHAPTER II

### THE TITLE-MONGERS

**H**ERR KRAUBER gave much consideration to the question of admitting Rolierre to the formulating of his plans. He had little faith in him; he had no belief in honour among thieves, and he knew that, like himself, Rolierre was all things to all men. But he knew also that Rolierre bore much unkindly feeling toward the marquis, the Countess Duval and other well-known hostesses of Paris having by their worship at Montrecourt's shrine kindled jealousy among the lesser lights.

Moreover, Rolierre was by no means free from the favours Krauber had conferred upon certain acquaintances whom he regarded as possibly available tools in some future emergency. Now was the time to demand the tributes of vassalage. Rolierre would doubtless be of some assistance in making certain neces-

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sary calculations, for he had visited the United States and knew far better than Krauber what it cost to live there fashionably.

Therefore, after a careful balancing of the matter in his mind and a recognition of the probability that the influence of Rolierre, the man of unquestionable social position, might be of more avail than his own exertions, the German determined to admit Rolierre into his scheme.

In the morning he gave little heed to the financial reports of his newspaper (usually so carefully perused), and his coffee became cold before being tasted, — the coffee his valet took such pains to prepare, and brought with the inevitable rolls and scraps of paper upon which the capitalist daily figured his profits.

To-day he despatched a short note to Rolierre, asking him to drop in during the morning for a chat and a cup of his excellent coffee. He felt well satisfied when Rolierre appeared without delay.

Having a knowledge of this man, Krauber knew the necessity for diplomacy and careful sounding before coming to

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his plans. And so he talked for an hour or more, disclosing nothing, but gradually leading up to his scheme while making sure of Rolierre. At noon he suggested a breakfast at their favourite café; his experience had long since taught him the efficacy of a well-cooked meal.

"Speaking of Montrecourt," said he, having found a table in a somewhat secluded corner, "speaking of the marquis, I have an idea by which I think you and I may be able to help him out of his difficulties."

Rolierre expressed surprise at Krauber's charitable inclinations.

"And also," went on the German, "so to arrange matters that he can pay off his creditors, including ourselves."

Rolierre understood the charitable inclinations.

"I think I am right in believing," continued Krauber, "that you also are among Montrecourt's creditors?"

The Frenchman nodded and observed that he knew of very few who were not in the same position. "Montrecourt owes money to every one."

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"And have you not noticed of late," asked Krauber, "how depressed he has become, how his debts seem to weigh upon him?"

Rolierre confessed in the negative. "But then," said he, "my eyes are not gifted with second sight."

"Well, granting that his debts are depressing him," pursued Krauber, "do you think he would agree to an arrangement perhaps not altogether pleasant, in order to pay them?"

"He might be made to do so," suggested Rolierre.

"How?"

"By bringing the influence of his creditors strongly to bear upon him."

"Exactly," exclaimed Krauber, rubbing his fat hands together in surprise and delight at the promise of the other's ready co-operation. "Doubtless you remember," he went on, "the Countess Duval's story of her penniless son's marriage to an heiress in America, and nearly half the girl's fortune settled on him, so I learned later. Why should we not send Montre-court across the ocean with plenty of

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money in his pocket and the best of introductory letters? You can get those. I can furnish the capital. There are undoubtedly many girls waiting for titles. If they marry such miserable specimens of nobility as I hear some of them do, — I don't mean Henri Duval; he was fairly presentable, — they should receive the dashing, heartbreaking Montrecourt with arms wide open."

Rolierre ordered an absinthe. This plan, being so far out of the ordinary, shocked him. He questioned whether his nerves would not be shattered by so much excitement. Then he sipped his drink and murmured, "Krauber, you are a genius."

"Now, now," laughed the German, "you're too flattering. But let us make a rough estimate of the necessary expenditure to carry out this plan. Here, *garçon*, some note-paper."

Then they fell to figuring; and it may not be amiss here to publish, in the concise manner of Krauber, the rough estimate at which they finally arrived. It shows the amount of capital he must

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needs expend in this extraordinary venture, together with what he termed his "probable" and "possible" profits. In the list below, for the sake of calculation at sight, Krauber's francs are given an approximate value in dollars.

### EXPENSES TO BE INCURRED IN SENDING M. TO AMERICA TO MARRY AN HEIRESS

Passage . . . . . \$150

(This should cover tips, necessary dinners to acquaintances who may be of future use, drinks, etc. No gambling.)

Hotel board, after arrival . . . . \$10 per day

(This should also include tips and occasional small dinners.)

Big entertainments, drives, and sundries, \$200 per month.

Clothes (to last all summer) . . . . \$600

Presents to heiress and her family (flowers, etc.), \$100 per month.

Valet . . . . . \$40 per month

Horse, trap, and groom . . . \$80 per month

Total per month (including passage), \$980.

"Liberal enough?" queried the German.

"Yes, with another five hundred added for sundries."

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"Say fifteen hundred dollars a month. Would that carry him through?"

"Not a doubt of it," assented Rolierre.

Krauber rested from his eating, thus betraying the utmost thoughtfulness. "The marquis," continued he, "might leave about the first of May in order to arrive for a summer campaign. Summer's a good season, I suppose."

"Excellent, especially in America," rejoined the Frenchman. "Newport, Bar Harbor, Lenox, and other places,—all capital matrimonial markets. None better in the world; at least, so I've heard."

"May, June, July, August," pursued Krauber, "and September if it is essential to the completion of affairs. Five months at fifteen hundred dollars a month,—seventy-five hundred. That's about the capital we require."

"Might organise a stock company," facetiously suggested Rolierre. "*The Creditors' Matrimonial Syndicate*; capital, 38,000 francs, fully paid in."

Krauber politely smiled. "As to dividends," he observed, "they should be handsome, but we'll only ask for the full

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payment of his debts and a fair interest on my investment. Of course you understood that the interest comes to me; I shall be a preferred stockholder, so to speak, his debts to me being paid first, the interest on my capital next, his debts to you afterward."

"Of course," murmured Rolierre.

"Upon one point we must be absolutely certain," Krauber went on. "I mean the settlement,—the girl's settlement upon Montrecourt. American fathers are liberal with their settlements, especially to noblemen, are they not?"

"Very liberal," returned Rolierre; "at least, so I've been told."

"I shall certainly not consent to the match unless there's a check amply large enough to defray costs and all of our friend's liabilities."

"How will you manage so carefully to direct his movements?" asked Rolierre.

Krauber held his glass from his lips, for an instant seeming perplexed. Then his brow cleared before a smile of bland satisfaction. "By a system of cipher cablegrams," came the quick rejoinder.

—



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"And you think there's no chance of the marquis giving us the slip?" ventured Rolierre.

"Not much. Besides, I can take a trip over myself if matters progress too slowly."

"Anyway, I fancy he is too honourable," observed the other.

"You misuse your words, my dear Rolierre. You mean *honest*. I think he has more honour than honesty. That's the worst of it. His honour may frustrate our plans; I can look to his honesty. You see, when he comes to think this over it will be a battle between his honour and his honesty. One will say it would be unfair to the woman; the other will tell him it is only fair to the creditors that debts should be paid."

"Krauber, you've wonderful reasoning power, really marvellous," drawled Rolierre, and called for another glass. "Then here's to the *Creditors' Matrimonial Syndicate*," exclaimed he, holding aloft the absinthe. Krauber indulgently chuckled and drank. The two arose and strolled away.

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"I can depend upon you," said the capitalist, "to bring Montrecourt to dinner to-morrow night."

"I think there will be no trouble. Where shall it be?"

"How about the Café-Maire?"

"Comfortable, very comfortable. The Café Maire, then, to-morrow at seven."

Then the Syndicate separated.

## CHAPTER III

### DEBTS

**A**T the awakening of day the Marquis Montrecourt turned over in his bed, slowly opened his eyes, rubbed them, and looked out at the window. Off to his right the rising sun flushed the eastern sky, casting on the Seine the first colour of dawn. Before him a light mist arose from the Jardin des Tuileries, — sleep going from Paris.

The marquis meditated. With a stretch of his arms and a listless yawn he thought of the days when he had been able to sleep his mornings away, and upbraided Morpheus for having deserted him.

But with the tints of morning pleasant thoughts came and a memory. The memory was of an oval face superlatively good and pure and true, crowned with a mass of red-gold hair dressed after an old manner, high at the centre and waving

down in gentle curves over the temples like golden bows above the arrows of the eyes.

"Ah, those eyes!" said the marquis to himself, "eyes with the power of Heaven, great deep auburn eyes, eyes that might bewitch the world."

He had felt their might, and now he rested his head on his arm more closely to gaze into the face which he had seen only once passing near him among many others on the Bois; in imagination he had seen it several times since, his fancy having caused it to smile and to frown upon him by turns, his ears having given it voice, his hands having almost felt the grasp of small fingers. Madame La Vie was considered pretty — bah! The Countess Duval — "La Belle Comtesse" — pooh! One might as well compare a cup of water with the ocean, a dab of blue paint with the sky! Perhaps they were pretty, but, heavens! they had no trace of that subtle fascination he termed *spirituelle*; besides, they were artificial, whereas this face seemed to him quite natural, as if never studied by its owner. His eye, long prac-

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tised in the observation of women, had found a great earnestness and intensity there, mingled with a generous foreign air of eternal sincerity.

All this he had seen in a few minutes, so he told himself, and had remembered. He was somewhat amused this morning as he realised that he had seldom given so much heed to any single subject.

"Sentiment!" said he, rather impatiently; "actually sentiment! *Encore affaire du cœur! Nom de Dieu! Pas pour moi, — moi, le roué, — mais que c'est drôle!*"

Then yawning away his absurd little fantasy, he called for his man, his coffee, and his bath.

He had reached that period in his life when he recognised the necessity of "pulling himself together," and he had begun to act in accord with this realisation. True, he had not come to a sudden halt and faced up the narrow road. Such measures result only from great awakenings. But he had slowly begun to eschew the deadly immoralities of his life, which had blunted his sensibilities and made slight inroads upon his wonderfully rugged

constitution, and had started out to guard his health, both moral and physical.

As he stood ready for his bath, he gazed critically at himself in the long mirror. He stood erect, his chest expanded, his head high. The muscles in his arms and legs stood out like thongs unbreakable. Folding his arms, he posed, but not in self-admiration, for the thought came that all this muscular perfection had been ignored, desecrated, wasted. He deserved no credit for it. He was born steel and he would probably die steel; his hardness was not the result of energy nor sacrifice nor exercise. Until now he had gone to no exertion to maintain it. Now, however, he had begun exercising. In the mornings after his coffee, he toyed with heavy dumbbells, submitted to massage by his valet, walked miles before his breakfast, drank less, gambled infrequently, and the light shone brighter in his eye. Why this new energy had come, he knew not, and little did he reason about it. Perhaps it was only a passing whim soon to leave him even more enervated than before, a luxurious, idle devotee at the shrine of Inertia.

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Whatever may have been the cause, he knew that the result was gratifying. In a few more weeks his insomnia might leave him, and his health regain its old perfection. Then — but he hardly dared hope for it — then if he could become financially free, he could snap his finger at the world, no longer demeaning the blood in his veins, — the rich blue blood of the Bourbons.

Even as the thought of his debts burdened him, while he dressed for his walk, one of his creditors came. It was Rolierre.

“Ah, my good Montrecourt, whither bound?”

“For a stroll,” answered the marquis, with some curtness.

“I came to ask you to dine with us this evening, with Krauber and myself informally at the Café Maire. What say you? We’ve an interesting plan to suggest.”

“Apropos of what?” queried the marquis.

“Of — er — of money matters.”

Montrecourt assumed an expression of infinite *ennui*. “You are very good,” said he, “but money matters are *such* a bore!”

Rolierre smiled pleasantly. "True, very true," he exclaimed. "Awful bore! But I think we have hit upon a plan by which you may be rid of your debts, all of them!" He watched the marquis intently. "May I join you in your walk?"

Montrecourt acquiesced, and together they sauntered along.

"By some gambling scheme?" asked the marquis, dismally. He had no faith in miracles, absolutely no hope of meeting his liabilities, and instinctively he concealed from Rolierre his strong desire to do so.

The latter looked perplexed. "No, no," he replied reassuringly. "We'll tell you of it at dinner. Are you not anxious to remove some of the weight from your shoulders? It seems to me you must feel it." Then he began a harangue with Debt for his topic. Feigning sympathy and the lending of a helpful hand, he talked as feelingly on the demoralising and degrading tendencies of debt as only a creditor can discourse with a debtor. Having absorbed some of Krauber's cunning and having been well instructed as



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to his words by that master of artfulness, he spoke as though his foremost wish were to aid Montrecourt by the plan rather than to derive any benefit himself.

The marquis listened with little display of interest. In point of wit Rolierre was no match for him ; even Krauber had less inherent good judgment.

But Rolierre's walk was fruitful. He gained the two objects of his visit,—an acceptance to dinner from Montrecourt, and the assurance that the latter was really desirous of paying his creditors.

Krauber learned the result with satisfaction, and greeted the marquis later with a despicable show of sycophancy and sham politeness. Montrecourt despised his host, and began dinner in ill humour, at odds with himself and the rest of the world.

Knowing the nature of his guest and the utter uselessness of a lengthy beating about the bush, the German came quickly to his point. Montrecourt was no Rolierre to be bamboozled by irrelevancies. Let us dramatise the little dinner scene at the Café Maire. Cast of characters: An om-

nivorous German, an ordinary Frenchman, an extraordinary Frenchman. Period: Not long ago. Scene—but surely the Café Maire is well known!

Herr Krauber, author and stage manager (an unusual combination); the Marquis Montrecourt, leading man; Monsieur Rollierre, supernumerary.

*Krauber* (as he carves the duck). “Well, my dear marquis, we would better speak plainly. You are a man capable of seeing beyond superficial diplomacies; I also dislike a wasting of words. You owe me a considerable sum of money. Until now I have rarely referred to it, knowing as I do your high sense of honesty and the ill-fortune which has retarded the payment of your debts. You are a gentleman. I know without an instant’s doubt that you are desirous of paying me and your other creditors. Perhaps you may think that in exchange for my loans you have rendered me valuable favours. I frankly admit it. Without your kindness I should not have gained my present position. Thanks to you and Monsieur Rollierre here, I have risen from — from — well, from lower walks

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of life. Partly by my own exertions, perhaps — ”

*Rolierre* (interrupting). “ Principally, my dear Krauber — really.”

*Krauber* (continuing with no heed to the flattery). “ But unquestionably, you have aided me. However, I (being blunt and lacking in nice manœuvres of language) am speaking straightforwardly as man to man. Money is money, and at present I am in a somewhat straitened condition. [*Aside*: Of course there ’s no truth in that.] Within a few months I shall positively need, at the least, one hundred thousand francs of what you owe me.”

*Montrecourt* (aghast). “ Herr Krauber, it is out of the question — quite impossible ! ”

*Krauber* (as he refills the glasses). “ Yes, it would seem so at first thought, but I have a plan to suggest — ”

*Montrecourt* (breaking in hopelessly). “ Baccarat ? ”

*Krauber* } (in chorus). “ No, no — in-  
*Rolierre* } deed, no ! ”

*Montrecourt* (pushing away the duck he has hardly tasted). “ What then ? ”

*Krauber.* "Marquis, as you must know without having self-conceit, you are a man of power among women. I do not wish to flatter. We are talking business."

*Montrecourt.* "Then women should scarcely be a topic. What have they to do with it?"

*Rolierre* (delightedly). "Ah, you will see. It is excellent!"

*Krauber.* "Yes; and without mincing of words, we want you to marry a rich woman,—to go to America, like young Duval, and wed an heiress. I will pay your expenses. Now that the suggestion is made and the way opened before you, honesty should compel you to accept. Moreover—"

*Montrecourt* (blandly interrupting). "Gentlemen, I thank you for your dinner. I have indeed enjoyed it and your generous offer, which I think I understand without further details at present. The hour is late, and as I have just remembered an engagement at the Club I must beg you to let me hurry away.

"The boldness of your plan I admire. As a cleverly conceived, cold-blooded man-

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ner of paying one's debts I have never seen its equal. Compared with it, bacarat is insignificant, roulette a game for the nursery. For the high sense of honour shown in your offer, however, you are to be congratulated. Some might call it quite, really quite damnable, you know, but I am not given to such forcible words nor to the forceful principles inspiring them. Therefore I shall carefully consider the matter at my convenience and soon give you an answer. Good-night."

(Exit the Marquis Montrecourt, while Krauber and Rolierre remain in silence with some show of surprise and questioning looks.)

### CURTAIN.

As the two creditors made their way home from the café, the German appeared deeply thoughtful and in good humour despite Rolierre's doubting observation, "He will never come to terms."

"Well, think as you will of it," returned Krauber, carelessly; "but I am willing to make you a small wager, — a dinner, if you like. I will bet that within two weeks

Montrecourt will accept our proposal. We will give him another dinner: if he accepts, you pay for it; if he refuses, it is at my expense. What say you?"

"I shall be only too glad to take your wager and — the dinner."

So they betted.

"Don't you think," asked Rolierre, with some decision, "that you were too blunt with him?"

"Not in the least," came the answer, as they separated. "It showed the earnestness, the telling business-like method of the plan; it showed our sincerity and our — our honesty, you see. This manner of dealing with men, by its very force at first it antagonises, later it conquers. But, I suppose, you don't quite understand."

"No," confessed Rolierre, drearily, "not quite."

Montrecourt went to his Club, the Cercle de la Rue Royale at the corner of Rue Royale and the Rue Rivoli. There for two hours he sat alone with absinthe and cigarettes of his own making. The suggestion of Krauber fully occupied his thoughts. He pondered long upon it and gave it a

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hearing despite his first impulse. In part it was no new idea to him. He knew that a rich woman was his only salvation. Like a captive searching for every possible manner of escape, he considered the chances of "marrying money;" but, even granting that his honour were to make no remonstrance, where were the means to attain his end? Until now he had thought of none. This night, however, had discovered them. The sole remaining hindrance, therefore, was his strong unwillingness to barter his honour and title, — the old title long ago proudly borne, deeply respected, and certainly powerful.

He had heard enough of Krauber's scheme to know the whole of it. Already his natural speed of thought had outlined the plan with nearly as much fulness as Rolierre and the German.

Let it be here positively set down (not to be refuted) that the Marquis Montrecourt was a philosopher, and that, being a philosopher, he never feared contact with Fact. The present chronicler wishes not to condone the cause of Montrecourt's thoughts now to be presented, neither to

condemn it, but rather to deal fairly with the men and women of this small history, showing their faults in accurate proportion to their virtues, their failures to their success, for the best of us are sometimes villains and the worst at times are heroes. The photograph speaks truths; the painting exaggerates. Let this be the photograph.

Although he had never loved, Montre-court knew that often — and perhaps generally — the end of loving is sorrow, for he had seen others love. The true philosopher judges not by the indulgence of fancy, nor yet alone by his own experience, but rather by the close observation of Fact and the inspection of his fellow-livers. The marquis knew well that marriage was not the spiritual coupling of man and woman, life for ever after to be lived in ethereal raptures. He knew, too, that many, if not most, marriages are made on earth. Long ago he had seen the deception and failures, the frailties and miseries, the base, desecrating passions, of what the world knows as Love. Nevertheless, buried away somewhere, he kept an ideal of love. Despite



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all the dragging of its name through the mire he believed in its eventual efficacy, in the might of its coming power, "for," said he to himself, "that which is most imitated and is most difficult of imitation surely is the greatest of all things."

And yet had any acquaintance in his superficial world been told of this sentiment, surely the teller would have been laughed to ridicule. For of all Montrecourt's discerning friends not one could penetrate beneath the sparkle and polish of his surface. Like some mountain lake, by its very clearness and seeming shallow deceiving the traveller and drowning him in great depths, the marquis had proved alluring to some venturesome ones who, thinking to bask in his harmless shallowness, had gone beyond their depth, much to their own undoing.

Unlike some men of a similar nature, however, Montrecourt could have had no fear in the explorations of his own depths, — his omission to do so was merely an indifference, — but rather should he have feared his flippancy. For, although the complete and constant flippancy of cer-

tain groundlings works small harm, the occasional moodful flippancy of philosophers sometimes damns.

To-night this moodful flippancy, the superficiality of his nature, seen always by his acquaintances and only at times by Montrecourt himself, overcame him.

He reasoned thus: "Perhaps one man in one hundred marries, knowing positively that he loves. About nine marry, knowing positively that they do not love. I should think the remaining ninety might be divided about evenly to include those who think they love, those who don't think so, and those who don't think at all. Of the nine who marry, knowing they do not love, I doubt if any have so worthy an object as I.

"For these men's marriages are usually either the unpleasant result of mere physical passion uncontrolled, or of a diplomatic arrangement by relations high in the land, or of a desire to be supported and raised socially.

"As Krauber said, I am a gentleman, and the true gentleman wishes to remain no man's debtor for long. The question

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resolves itself into this: Shall I, by refusing Krauber's offer, remain a miserable slave financially, without money enough to leave Paris or return the hospitalities of my friends, but absolutely free so far as women are concerned; or shall I take the chance of becoming a woman's slave, tied to the strings of her purse, but absolutely cut free from these oppressing financial obligations?"

The marquis, from his secluded corner of the club-room, called for another glass of absinthe and toyed with his cigarette-papers.

And his eyes looked off,—far away. For an instant his calm reasoning had been disturbed by thought of that annoying, haunting, disquieting little face,—the face framed in gold,—the foreign face on the Bois.

In another moment, however, it was gone, and he came quickly to his decision. Perhaps the absinthe aided him in it; perhaps it was helped by the imagined looks of petty disdain from the eyes of his fellow-clubmen; perhaps his mood, the sophistry of his reasoning, the posting of his name

on the club bulletin, and, last and greatest, the glitter of great wealth, all aided in bringing him to his decision. Whatever may have been the cause, the result was well shown in his words, low-muttered to himself at midnight before the door of his apartment on the Rue de la Quai across the Seine.

Said he: "Under certain conditions any change is for the better. Can any woman be a more objectionable mistress than Krauber is a master? No! Although, of course, I shall never be the one man in a hundred who knows he loves, it is just possible that I shall not be one of the nine who know they do not love. I shall go to neither one extreme nor to the other, but shall doubtless be among the mediocre lot who are satisfied. Then, after all, perhaps none of them will have me. *Mon Dieu!* That would be Krauber's first failure! How very amusing! It's quite possible too, for I'm much stupider than I used to be, and Rolierre tells me (on some one else's authority, of course) that American girls must be amused first and married afterwards."

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The decisions of Montrecourt, once made, were never revoked. In the morning his faithful Pierre took to Krauber a note, brief and pointed:—

MY DEAR HERR KRAUBER, — I am now favourably considering your offer of last evening. If its details prove as satisfactory to me as its outline, we shall doubtless be able to agree upon terms at our next meeting.

Yours,

MONTRECOURT.

Imagine the German's satisfaction! Picture the expansion of his rubicund cheeks forced apart by the broadening of his great mouth in smiles. Think of the blatant self-congratulation in the roll of his head, that blinking of his eyes, that clasp of his fat hands! And picture, too, the deep, silent admiration of Rolierre when he also read the note; think of his deferential bow before Krauber's success, his apology for having doubted!

A brief reply was sent by Pierre:

MY DEAR MARQUIS, — I am glad that you are looking upon my plan in a business-like manner. The prospects indeed seem bright. What say

you to another little dinner at the same café to-morrow night? That corner with the small table is so very conveniently quiet.

Yours,

KRAUBER.

The invitation was accepted. The three men dined together and late into the night sat talking. A most business-like conversation it was, with never a trace of hesitancy on the part of Montrecourt, and a great show of liberal offers by Krauber. Rolierre, acting upon the commands of his leader, maintained discreet silence. Throughout the evening the marquis drank nothing, and spoke only in answering the German's suggestions. His behaviour was that of a man about to make a formal commercial contract of which he was merely a disinterested signer for some third person. Frequently he had shown more excitement at a bacarat table with only a few francs in the game. He had ever been one of those men who apparently look upon incidents as events, and upon events as incidents. He had given more outward heed to his bath this morning than to his compact

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this evening. Inwardly it may have been different, — no one knows.

The estimate of expenses to be incurred, previously drawn up by Krauber and Rolierre, was submitted to him, his comment being, "Not very liberal; the outlay must be large for big returns."

Krauber haggled.

"Add nine or ten thousand francs," suggested the marquis, "for I wish to entertain."

After much murmuring the Syndicate's capital stock was accordingly increased.

"And now," said the German, taking from his pocket a sheet of note-paper, "I have written a letter addressed from you to me, which I trust you will sign. It's only a matter of form, my dear marquis, — only a matter of form, you know."

Montrecourt took it and read; the German narrowly watched him.

HERR KRAUBER.

DEAR SIR, — I cheerfully accept your offer of a loan of ——— francs, and thinking that you may like to know the way I intend to make use of your loan, I write to say that upon receipt of

—— francs I shall start out upon a little trip to America. And who can say that while there I may not meet some eligible dame possessing a fortune? If I do marry such a desirable woman, believe me, my dear Krauber, I shall immediately settle in full all my financial obligations to you, the thought of which weighs so heavily upon me.

And furthermore, Herr Krauber, I give you my word that if I meet a woman having an assured income of over two hundred thousand francs, be she young or old, beautiful or ugly, and no matter how unattractive, I shall marry her if she is willing.

Yours very truly,

Montrecourt sat for a minute or two, silently turning over the letter in his hands and its contents in his thoughts.

"You see," ventured Krauber, "I have made it seem informal, and as though there were no agreement whatever regarding your plan."

"So I notice," returned the other; "yet it is a binding contract."

Krauber nodded, but with an expression of denial, as though he would say (but of course he could n't at all) that it was n't binding in the least.



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"I must refuse to sign it," said Montrecourt, with quiet decision, bringing consternation to the hearts of the title-mongers. "But verbally I agree to it and all that is contained in it. My word is above question." He started to rise, as though to leave them, seeming indignant at the thought of their doubting his integrity.

Krauber looked worried. "A thousand pardons if I have offended you!" said he, and the marquis showed forgiveness by sitting down again. Surely there's never a debtor can't master his creditor if he only knows how.

Krauber cringed. "Then, my dear marquis," he pursued, "if you will not sign it, would you object — would you object very much to reading the note aloud to Rolierre and me, — merely, you know, as a — as a somewhat specific declaration of — of good faith?"

"Have n't the slightest objection in the world," consented Montrecourt, and then he read it to them with an appreciative, rather-amused air, as though it were a delicious philosophical titbit from Gautier or Balzac, or some quaint drollery of

Rabelais. Then carefully he placed it in his pocket. "I shall take it with me," said he, "that I may consult it abroad and live up to its very letter."

Krauber's blandness returned. "When shall you sail?" he queried, contentedly draining his last glass.

"Next week," came the reply, the promptitude, sincerity, and willingness in Montrecourt's voice bringing further trust and satisfaction to the creditors.

"I really don't wish to hurry you," declared Krauber.

"I shall not hurry," was the response; "believe me, I should n't go next week were it not quite convenient. And when may I have your cheque?"

"To-morrow I can give you ten thousand francs, and the rest I can send you monthly as you need it. Of course, my dear marquis, I expect you to send me itemised monthly statements."

"Willingly," returned Montrecourt. "I shall direct Pierre, a clever fellow at accounts, I assure you, to keep my books. But before leaving I shall want half the capital paid over to me, and a note for the

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balance. You see, I wish to run no risk of being stranded in America."

Again Krauber objected, and again after much bargaining Montrecourt carried his point. Then, after expressing hope for the success of their venture, he went towards his home; while the other two remained longer, deep in the discussion of this unique speculation in which nearly fifty thousand francs were to be invested, with only a man's honesty as security and the man himself as stock in trade.

Like many a Frenchman in real life and like innumerable others in French fiction, Montrecourt stopped for a moment while crossing the Seine that night and looked down. It had been a long walk from the Café Maire, and thoughts had forced themselves upon him.

The river, silvered by the moon and stars, brought to him a small impulse; but this impulse came only to go, routed by his laughter at its absurd extravagance. He walked away.

And before morning he awoke muttering, "No, not I; they may go to the devil!"

and lighted a candle to reach for note-paper. But he did no writing, presently returning to a quiet sleep with no troublesome tossing in his bed, neither the faintest mark of care on his deep brow.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CONVERSATION OF MR. CRAWFORD BLURDGE WITH HIS HOST IN THE GREEN TAVERN OF BRISTOL

**I**F we start out upon a drive from the city of Providence to the town of Bristol, we shall, in the course of our little journey, pass through a number of Rhode Island's villages until we reach Warren (the grayest and dullest of them all), where we come onto a straight high-road at the other end of which lies our destination, four miles away. It is on this turnpike that we shall find ourselves shaded in the warm months by veteran oaks and elms ranged in soldierly file on either side, to parry the sun-bolts. And it is about halfway between Warren and Bristol on this road that we shall come upon a small drinking-house, very old and green, with the mould and moss and lichens clinging to its

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weather-battered shingles, and covering its low shed at the side, where we may tie our horse before wetting our throats.

The Green Tavern is a quaint sort of place and somewhat peculiar. Rarely do we find there more than two or three visitors at a time, and still more seldom none at all.

At all events, one evening early in June the tavern was not lacking in callers,—most unexpected callers,—some of whom were never seen there before and never have been there since. But of these a little later, for, at the moment of which we write, the drinking-house had but one occupant besides the old man and his old dog who lived in it. A frowsy, unkempt Bohemian was this dog Nibbles, and much the same sort of creature was Nibbles' master; and although possessed of so many similar characteristics the two were inseparable. Where old Lemuel Johnson went, there also went Nibbles. When Lemuel, by a rub of his hands or a wrinkled smile, betrayed satisfaction, then Nibbles allowed not his diminutive tail a minute's rest, or if master saddened, then

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dog hung head and tail and saddened, too.

"Hi there, you Nibbles!" often exclaimed the tavern-keeper; "I tell you if you was n't a yeller cur you'd be a thoroughbred."

Now, undeniable as this observation may have been regarding the dog, we question whether it could have been so aptly applied to the third occupant of Green Tavern. While it would not be polite or nice or gentlemanlike to speak of Mr. Crawford Bluridge as a cur, it would be going much further from the truth to describe him as a thoroughbred.

Having no new mischief after which to prowl on this rainy evening, and dreading loneliness (villains are such poor company for themselves), little Crawford Bluridge sat comfortably in the tavern, tilting his chair and blinking his faded bluish eyes before a mug of ale, while he talked with his host, and the dog drowsed upon the dingy bar. Here Bluridge felt more at home than among the people of his own class, being one of those men born and bred high, but natured low.

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Coarseness in all things he enjoyed, yet not even in the lowest whisper dare we breathe the remark, "Not a gentleman," for who in the world would question his position in society, or the antiquity of the Bluridge family? If we said to ourselves, "Not a man," it might be different, but, of course, we scarcely think of making any such criticisms. Nowadays it is so much more important to be a gentleman than to be a man.

"Now, I think of it," said Lemuel Johnson, growing more than usually convivial and familiar over his beer,— "now I think of it, Mr. Bluridge, when am I to have the pleasure of congratulating you? How's Miss Flub?"

"She's well enough, Lem," returned the other, rather sourly; "but there's a devil of a Frenchman turned up in Newport, and he's after her."

"But surely," observed the tavern-keeper, "you're not afraid of any foreign feller cuttin' you out."

"Not very much — because I am also after him;" and Bluridge smiled knowingly.



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"Oh, ho!" laughed Lemuel. "I can't help bein' sorry for the Frenchman. But if it ain't over-inquisitive, may I ask what you mean?"

"Well, you see," said Blurdge, "Ray Fabian, who met him in Paris, tells me the Frenchman has been leading a deucedly swift life, generally raising Cain; so I've written over to another Frenchman I used to know, named Rolierre, asking about our dear friend. There may be something very bad, you know."

"So there may, so there may," assented old Johnson; and then they changed the subject. "Speaking of Ray Fabian," said Lemuel, "how long do you suppose that fortune will last the boy now that he's come of age and has it outright? eh, Mr. Blurdge?"

"Not long, you can bet. I guess the sister has had a pretty hard time keeping him straight since the old man died."

"That's the truth; and the sister, has she the same amount?" asked Lemuel, always on the scent for information.

"So they say," returned the other.

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“And it’s in her own right, too. Very foolish of the old man to leave it so. Why, bless you, she can throw the whole million into the ocean if she wants to!”

“My, my! that’s kind of dangerous now, is n’t it?” observed the tavern-keeper.

“Very,” returned the other. “Hulloa! hear the thunder. Think I’ll go home before the storm’s any worse. Good-night to you.” Then he paid for his drinks and left.

But after he went through the doorway he chanced to look up the road to Warren, and some distance away he saw by the lightning-flashes a buggy coming towards him; so he stepped from the rain to the cover of the tavern-shed, hoping for the approach of a friend who would drive him home.

As soon as he was gone from the tavern, Lemuel, not knowing that he still remained near by, opened a window and drew in the shutters, caring little that the rain tormented upon his white head. In the far distance, off near the eastern horizon, a low roar started, and growing fierce came across the sky. It put haste into his hand

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on the shutters. Nibbles awoke and ran beneath the bar, tail down. In an instant the sky was cleft by flame. It was the first thunder-storm of the hot months, and came like a lion.

## CHAPTER V

WHICH HAS TO DO WITH JUPITER PLUVIUS,  
DAN CUPID, APOLLO, AND CERBERUS

NIBBLES howled noisily as if to keep from his ears the furious thundering. Forth he ventured from under the bar and rubbed his master's leg, demanding protection. Lemuel drank clear whiskey, the first in years. For a few minutes the wild gale discordantly shrieked and the rain beat fiercely on all sides, thunder and lightning made simultaneous onslaughts, and Lemuel Johnson sat on a low chair, rocking to and fro, Nibbles huddled beside him, both trembling.

"What would Crawford Blurdge say if he'd see me now? You're afeard, Lemuel. Shame on you! You ain't got the grit of old Nibbles." A growl of thunder greeted this deprecation. The old man crouched. "Wonder how near

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it is," he whispered. "How sudden it comes!" He counted his pulse-beats. "Folks say you can measure it this way. God, Nibbles! The house is struck!" This time both dog and man took refuge among the casks beneath the bar. A ball of flame had suddenly preyed upon the great oak near the tavern, and the topmost branches of a giant bough had fallen crashing through shutters and window. This havoc being wrought, both thunder and lightning beat a slow retreat, like bullies, with fitful flashes of temper and low grumblings.

While discussing with himself the expediency of sending occasional contributions to the village church, a greater surprise than the felling of the oak came to Lemuel. For presently he heard approaching the rattle of wheels and the oozing of hoof-beats in the mud.

"God save them that's outside!" said he, barricading the broken shutters with an old table-top.

Then the wheel sounds stopped, and evidently there was a drawing of rein before the tavern. Nibbles, coming forth

with a sudden burst of courage, jumped upon the bar, loudly barking.

Lemuel listened.

A loud bang upon the door was answered by the dog with ominous growls.

"Who's there?" demanded Johnson, a hand on the latch.

"It's I," called a man, but the voice being unrecognised, the query came, "Who's I?"

"Hurry, Lem, for Heaven's sake open the door," commanded the voice. "It's Ray Fabian. Quick, I say!"

Instantly bolts were thrown and the door swung back, admitting a shower of rain into the room, while a gust of wind nearly put out the lamp as two figures came in,—a girl with a carriage robe drawn closely about her, a man with a horse blanket thrown over his shoulders, both seeming like some eldritch phantom children of the storm, both drenched and all forlorn.

Lemuel slammed the door, and stood looking at the couple in mute surprise.

"No questions now, Lem," said Fabian, bringing chairs to the side of the rusty

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cooking-stove. "We're wet through. But I must put up the horse; I'll be back in a minute." And so saying he hurried out.

The girl threw off her lap-robe, holding her palms to the glowing isinglass of the stove. In marked contrast to her dismal surroundings, she seemed like some good beam of sunshine come to make brightness among sodden decrepitude. Yet the tavern had some small cheer to it, the kind, mellow cheer that lurks deep in old age despite darkness.

She sat resting her feet on the stove-rim, — midget feet in toy slippers of suède. The old man shuffled about in search of a kettle, now and then casting furtive glances at her. Nibbles sniffed shyly at the hem of her skirt; and when the kettle began its merry song upon the stove, the maid, as if yielding to its good spirits (for what so cheering as a kettle's song?) patted the dog kindly, and from that moment the two were friends. Then she untied a knot beneath her chin and took from her head a clinging scarf, showing a quantity of black, clustering, flippant little

curls struggling downward as if trying to reach the blue eyes,—those somewhat shallow blue eyes with far more girlish pleasantry than power in them. A dainty triolet, a froth of verse with its pretty rhyme, not grand nor mighty in its poetry, yet for a moment tickling the ear as does the faintest breeze of May, would best describe the face. And in it there should be mention of straying curls, of laughing eyes, of little varying charms pictured in a thousand other madrigals inscribed to some initial, and born to live an hour. There are countless little songs like this daily passing on the air, and as many pleasant maidens' faces seen on the walks of life,—beams of sun, brightening, cheering—and no more. Indeed, this face before the stove-glow was unnoteworthy, interesting only to those easily interested, attractive, but no more so than a score of others more readily remembered.

Now, as Fabian went to blanket his horse in the shed, his head was so full of thought on these blue eyes that he failed to see quite another pair (not blue, but only bluish and far from beautiful), peer-



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ing at him from a window in the tavern's back room near the rear entrance.

So he came into the tavern, unconcernedly whistling.

"Have you been in the storm without the blanket over you?" she asked, with a faint glimmer of anxiety, then, trying to be cross, "Your foolhardiness will kill you some day. Crazy boy!"

"What's the farmer's old saying?" asked Ray, carelessly:—

"Stall a horse without a blanket,  
And pretty soon you'll have to plant it!"

"But the storm won't last," he went on, sitting by the girl before the stove. "The clouds are already breaking. Anything for us, Lem?"

"Coffee, hot coffee, that'll warm you and Miss—er—you and the young lady through and through."

Ray leaned forward and whispered to her: "May I introduce you? It will please him. He's a nice old soul and used to know father."

"Of course."

"This is Miss Minturn, Lemuel; Miss

Minturn, Mr. Johnson." The old man shambled forward, wiped his hand on his coat, and held it out with a good-natured welcome.

"I've heard of you before, Mr. Johnson," said she. "You knew Mr. Fabian's father, I believe."

"I was that lucky," answered Lemuel, warmly.

"Well, Mr. Johnson," she went on, "if it had n't been for Green Tavern to-night, we should have found no shelter this side of Bristol."

Lemuel declared by sundry *now, nows!* and *no, no, misses!* that she undoubtedly overestimated his hospitality, that really refuge was to be found on all sides (although he knew there was n't a house or a shed within a quarter of a mile), and observed with a proud though furrowed smile that the obligations were all on his shoulders after being allowed the privilege of opening his humble door to such a lady as Miss Minturn of the well-known Minturn Homestead.

Surely there never was another such obsequious old shambler, yet withal possessed of a pleasant heart.

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"At seven o'clock," explained Ray, "we drove up to Nayatt for a late supper, with not the slightest thought of a storm. At half-past nine we started for home, and still the sky was clear. But at ten we were caught just this side of Warren and did n't know where to go. So we braved it, Lem, until it became worse than I ever knew. Then we saw the light in your window, and here we are."

"And I'm awful glad to see you. I was talking about you only a few minutes before you came."

"Oh, is there any one else in the tavern?" queried Adele, uneasily.

"No, Miss; Mr. Bluridge was here, but he left just before that big crack of thunder."

That 's fortunate, thought she; and the two sipped their steaming coffee while the tavern-keeper hovered about in the background. Nibbles drowsed at their feet.

"Del."

"Yes."

"Tell me something — you must know I've been meaning to ask you for ever so long — do you care for me?"

"Why, dear old Ray," she answered, looking up in surprise, "you know I've always been fond of you ever since the first day we met, when you rescued my squirrel — let's see — how long? — ten or fifteen years, I think." She dangled her scarf over Nibbles' ear.

"Do you love me, Del?"

"Don't joke," she answered. "This is not the time nor the place for it. We must go. I don't mind a little rain." She started up, but he stopped her with his hand on her arm. Nibbles awoke and blinked at them. The coals fell, and the fire lost some of its light. Its heat may have passed to Fabian, for suddenly there burst forth from him all the traditional Fabian ferocity and fire, and he grasped her hands. It was the same old threadbare story, with an unusually hot flame and a rather novel scenic effect given by the dingy liquor-shop.

Nibbles blinked, knowing that his loudest barks meant no bite, and he judged the man accordingly. Adele withdrew her hands from his, burying her face in them, otherwise Nibbles and Fabian might have

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seen a flood of colour rushing up the cheeks to meet the waving hair, and perhaps while Ray awkwardly tried to regain the fingers, those little white magicians, besides hiding the blush, took away a tear or two. Who knows? A woman is so clever with her hands and a man such a fool with his.

When his mood became less turbulent, she answered him. "Ray," said she, with sympathy in her voice, but no love, "for many years you and I have been close comrades: let us remain so; but as for marrying you — as for that — I don't love you, and even if I did, I would n't be your wife."

Fabian rose and strode to the bar. "Why not?" he asked dramatically.

"Just because I would n't," she replied, and that was all the answer she gave him. "We must leave now," she went on imperatively. "You know how people talk of this tavern. It's only a drinking-house, after all, no place for a woman."

"It's respectable, at any rate," rejoined Fabian.

"No matter what it really is," said she. "Remember the general opinion of it."

"There speaks Adele Minturn," he declared, "who considers the world's view before everything." He went to the window and looked out.

"There speaks Ray Fabian," she returned, "who snaps his fingers at the whole world's criticism."

"But not at a possible visitor here at this time of night," he replied, looking along the dark road and making sure of the door-bolts. "Here comes a man in a high dog-cart. I hope to the devil he does n't stop. Looks as though we might know him, too. It would be deucedly awkward for you, Del. Gad! the fellow's pulling up. He's stopped. Wait a second—that's all right—if he does n't know us no harm's done. I have a plausible story." Then Fabian threw the bolts.

"But, Ray—" began Adele, yet the sentence remained unended, for a stranger was already at the bar.

"Pierre!" called the man, in French, to a figure in the dog-cart, "leave the horse and come in." The other two, without seeing the stranger's face, sought the darkness of a corner shadow. But the voice

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seemed familiar to Fabian, who stood watching its owner narrowly. Then a growl from under the stove came from Nibbles, and the two were discovered. The firelight falling full upon the Frenchman, Ray surprised the girl by immediately stepping forward in recognition.

"If I am not mistaken, you are Monsieur le Marquis Montrecourt," said he, shaking hands, "my acquaintance of one or two evenings at the Folie Bergères. I am Mr. Fabian."

It was spoken in excellent French, and instantly the marquis returned the greeting. Fabian noticed that his eye wandered half uncertainly to Adele, but an excuse for her presence there was not wanting. Now, any man possessed of more natural worldly-wisdom than Fabian, more inborn *savoir-faire*, would not have been guilty of the blundering lie he invented for the emergency. A wiser man would have told the truth as he had told it to Lemuel Johnson, lightly and with frankness. But there's one thing to be said, had Ray been a wiser man and frank at this moment, there would have been no subsequent complications,

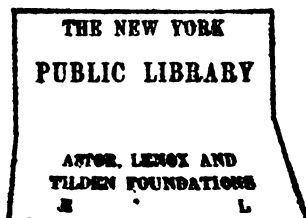
no serious consequences, and this record would necessarily have stopped here, or never been written. Yet the fact remains that Fabian *did* tell a blundering lie; and so the story goes on. And this was the blunder:—

“Monsieur Montrecourt,” said Ray, lapsing into English (of which the marquis was a clever master), “let me introduce you to my sister.” For a second the girl seemed taken aback, but quickly she hid her confusion with a cordial bow.

“Rather extraordinary meeting in this out-of-the-way place,” began Montrecourt, while the faithful Pierre mutely drained a hot drink behind his master, and Lemuel looked on in astonishment.

“Decidedly,” returned Ray. “A few days ago I heard you were in Newport; but when I left you in Paris last winter you had no intention of coming to America, had you?”

“None whatever. It was really quite an unexpected move; but I thought a sea voyage might brace me up a bit, and then you know it’s so tiresome—so very, very con-





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ductive to *ennui* — this spending a lifetime in Paris. Those who stay for an occasional week there call it the Gay City, and perhaps it is so; but to me excessive gayety is more enervating than utter stagnation. Metal rusts as quickly in a whirlpool as in a mill-pond."

"Well, you are certainly trying the other extreme," observed Ray, "if you have come from Paris to Bristol."

"Oh, dear, no; I'm stopping here only for a night. I expect to be at Newport for most of the season, — not exactly a mill-pond, you know."

"No," laughed Fabian. "It's more of a trout stream, where dear thoughtful little papas and mammas go a-fishing to provide for the family." Montrecourt twirled his moustache down instead of up: it was his only manner of wincing; but of course Ray did n't notice it. Ray seldom noticed anything.

Then Fabian and Adele (who had maintained a discreet silence) bowed a good-night to the marquis, Ray rashly extending most hospitable invitations to Fabian Park, much to the discomfiture of

the girl, who, after they had left the tavern, asked in vexation, "What shall you do if he comes?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, if he visits you, you stupid, he'll find out that I'm not your sister."

"Oh, it will come out all right in the wash," answered Ray, falling into his usual manner of dealing with emergencies.

It seemed a long uncongenial journey, — that three-mile drive on the dreary highway to Minturn Homestead, the driver doing his best to guide the horse past great mud-ruts among fallen trees, while Adele made as strong an endeavour to steer clear of a certain subject. But trees and subject proved unavoidable. First, a wheel was nearly smashed by a fallen oak branch; next, a silence was suddenly broken by further entreaties on the part of Fabian. At last, however, they reached the gates at the foot of the long avenue arbour'd by countless overhanging branches of weeping willows, oaks, and elms, leading to the old house. Upon arriving there he asked, "What shall you tell your grandmother, Del?"

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"All about it, under promise of strict secrecy."

"Not about my —"

"Oh, no! but you'd better not see me for a time," she said, looking up at him from the doorstep.

"No; I am going away."

For a second she held his hand in both of hers. "I would n't, Ray. At all events, think it over seriously. Good-bye. Hurry away, and you won't have to help me to explain. I do hope your friend the marquis will not take it into his head to come and see you." She let fall a huge griffin-headed door-knocker.

"Oh, he's probably forgotten that I exist; Montrecourt never remembers things," and he started the horse at a snail's pace. "Good-bye, Del."

But Montrecourt, back there in the Green Tavern sitting before a bottle of spirits, had not forgotten. Indeed, he decided that it might be well to call on the Fabians some day in the near future; they were so very, very rich, you see.

He beckoned to his valet. "Pierre, you may as well untie the horse. The storm

is past, and I shall go." Pierre started for the door.

"Wait a minute," said his master, and he returned.

"I shall spend the night at the Bristol hotel, and, now that I remember it, please do not call me early. Also — before I have forgotten — do not fail to send Herr Krauber a dispatch to-morrow morning to this effect: 'The article for sale seems to be considered valuable. Only question now is price.'" Pierre proceeded to the dog-cart.

Now, just as Montrecourt was about to follow, having spoken a pleasant word to Lemuel Johnson, the dog Nibbles began to behave in a most unusual way. He stood by the door leading from the bar to the back room, and poking his nose into the darkness growled savagely. Lemuel and the marquis watched him in surprise. Then suddenly he ran forward, snapping and snarling, but before the others could follow he came back quicker than ever he went, rolling over and over as though he had been kicked, and yelping piteously. Then a rear door slammed, and the men

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looked at each other in astonishment. The back room was empty, for they searched it by the light of a candle; but beyond the faintest doubt an intruder had been there and had just gone.

Montrecourt glanced at Nibbles, who limped about on three legs, still with a show of fight in him. And between the dog's teeth there hung a little piece of brown cloth, two or three inches square. "Good dog," said the marquis, as he transferred the small scrap from the mouth to a waistcoat pocket.

Lemuel, now being satisfied that the intruder no longer invaded Green Tavern, came into the front room to shower condolences upon Nibbles.

"Who could it have been?" queried Montrecourt.

"I ain't got the slightest idea," declared the old man, with the dog in his arms; "but if I ever catch him I'll — I'll — I'll —"

"Yes, I would," said the marquis, and he went out to the dog-cart. Then master and man drove away.

And as a pair of blar bluish eyes

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watched them from behind a tree on the roadside, the owner of these eyes muttered, "What can he mean by 'the article for sale' and a question of price? That fool marquis is n't in business."

## CHAPTER VI

OLÉA FABIAN

**T**HE broad piazza built upon three sides of the Fabians' house affords an excellent view of the land and water of Bristol. The house being at the top of Fish-Hawk Hill, northeast of the town, stands upon the highest ground in the county.

And if ever we have the good fortune to be the Fabians' guest on a fair day, we should choose the hour of sunset to enjoy the full beauty of our view. It is then that we should go to the balcony, where from the east we may look off over Mount Hope and Mount Hope Bay to busy, besmoked Fall River, with its scope of factories on the hillside, like so many huge, raging furnaces, their windows reflecting the flaming sun and their giant black chimneys belching forth gusts of whirling smoke. And we shall see the bay, like a carnival of spark re-

flections, dancing by millions until the sun falls behind Papoosesquaw Point. Moreover, if at sunset we stand upon the west piazza (or the morning side, as it is called by the Fabians on account of its shade early in the day), we shall see Bristol as a photographer would wish to look on it were he making a bird's eye view for a souvenir book, its modest steeples peeping out from among the trees, and its cottages, old and new, dingy and white by turns, in the open places. Past the town we shall see, all aglow, the harbor indenting Papoosesquaw Road; past that the little peninsula named in the days of the Pequot Indians "Papoosesquaw" (and so spelled to this day, but turned by barbarous modern tongues into "Poppersquash"), with its once stately mansions fast coming to their ruin and its barren apple-trees growing almost to its point, their branches, mingling with the water, bowed with age.

Off to our left lies Newport, too far away to be recognised; before us is Narragansett, dotted here and there by a number of small islands which oystermen and scallopers inhabit, and where sailing parties



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temporarily moor their boats to eat luncheon on the beach. In the middle distance lies Prudence, — a long low strip of green vignettèd at the south and west by sky and water.

And when we lie back comfortably in our lounging chairs we assure one another that Bristol seen thus over the tree-tops is picturesque indeed ; all trees, merry bays, idle inlets, hedges, and hills gathered together in seclusion as Nature's favourite art collection in Nature's private gallery.

On the morning after the great June storm, Fabian Park showed signs of the havoc wrought. Here and there among flower-gardens and on the broad lawn before the house, men busily cleared away fallen branches, carefully trimmed the battered box hedges, and in other ways worked industriously to restore the general order of things.

The cook hurried down to the dairy to see if the thunder had soured her cream. A brood of chickens called to her from the poultry field, and she threw corn to them.

Down in the stable-yard three or four horses received their regular morning grooming, while others were exercised in the paddock near by. In the stables brasses were polished and the usual high standard of Fabian scrupulous cleanliness was upheld. The old place was a park most attentively cared for. Each pebble in the road seemed to have its own position from which it might never stray; not a twig of the box hedge projected beyond its fellows. Old orchards generally revel in their scraggly disorder, but the trees of the Fabian orchard stood about in rows with the primness of spinsters.

The neighbouring good people of Bristol frequently declared that the place had been robbed of its natural wild beauty since old Charles Fabian's death, and that now it was far too artificial to be beautiful. Possibly, however, the envy-creating Fabian money was the cause of these complaints rather than any true love of beauty among the complainers, whose own houses, large or small, were run to seed, weedy and ill-kept, being able to boast only of better days gone by. In fact, the Fabians were the

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only family in Bristol who had managed to retain their inherited wealth, — probably because it was great enough to last through the most extravagant expenditures for a number of generations. But (as Crawford Blurdge had suggested in Green Tavern) it might even now have been exhausted by thoughtless, thriftless Ray Fabian, had this fellow not been lovingly watched over by a good angel in the form of a sister; and (as Blurdge failed to state), had not this sister had an adviser (of course quite unselfish and entirely disinterested), in the form of an executor of her father's estate. This gentleman's name was Mr. Herbert Mortimer, and we shall learn a thing or two about him later.

The Fabians' breakfast on this bright spring morning was an unusually sorry one, for in his seat at the table Raymond frowned, pouted, and was silent. Now, these manifestations of ill humour being so entirely foreign to his usual manner, brought no little consternation and surprise to the other two members of his family, and perhaps especially to the aunt, a nice little woman with white hair

under a lace cap and tortoise-shell glasses on her nose.

"You're not in your usual good spirits," she observed with anxiety, surveying her idol. His faintest frown was almost a sorrow to her. Oh, generation of kindly old relatives, when are your fond eyes to be opened, that unworthiness may lose your doting? When shall insolent youth bow to your weight of years, and to your grave judgment of it, no longer by thoughtless pride to mock your wrinkles, your blind idolatry?

"Not feeling any too well," he replied shortly.

"Where?" she queried.

"Headache," he answered.

"You rarely have one."

"Not often."

"Is nothing else wrong, Ray?"

"No; not much. I must go out to see the horses. Sorrel's lame, you know. See you later." And he left the table to be alone.

At the head of the table sat his sister, Oléa Fabian, so named after her mother, of Huguenot lineage, dead these ten years.

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Now, if some master scientist were to invent a sort of psychological camera, an instrument to reproduce in miniature the natures of men and women, even as their faces are transferred to prepared films and their voices recorded on cylinders of wax, it might be possible accurately to picture the character of Oléa Fabian; but not the cunningest master of wordcraft could paint this woman truly, for always some traits would remain hidden, and upon seeing others the painter's fervid admiration would flatter. For Oléa was one of those women for ever idealised by men.

If she had questioned the brother at breakfast this morning, it was only with her eyes, for her tact was never overcome by curiosity. And those eyes, with the fire to burn themselves into men's hearts, what word was not in their language? to what question could they not compel an answer? Certainly not this one, for in ten minutes Ray was seeking her to tell her all. How often the Fates ordain that two people, leaving another person from a mutual desire to be alone, shall be alone together.

He found Oléa, and putting his arm

about her, he kissed her, for he loved little more than to caress and to be caressed. Down at her side he sat, his head in his hands; and despite his melodramatic way surely there was some feeling in it. To have seen him thus, any who knew him must have pitied, for it was as when a hale, hearty, uncomplaining fellow lies in pain. Yet in her he ever found a ready sympathy.

"Why?" she demanded, stroking his thick hair.

"Why what?"

"You know, Ray; why are you so down-cast?" From the first he knew he would confide, but, like most men, he started upon his confidences with a feigning of great reserve.

"Oléa," said he, "am I absolutely unlovable?"

"Foolish boy!" and she ridiculed his question with the most musical little laugh in the world. "But why are you so absurd? Tell me."

And then he told her. He spoke of his drive from Nayatt, of their refuge at Green Tavern in the storm, of how he had met

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an acquaintance from Paris, Montrecourt by name, of whom she had never heard, and, last of all, he told her how he had lost Adele Minturn. The story was not all given in a few minutes, there being so many questions from Oléa and reluctant answers from Ray.

"Why did you never tell me you loved her?"

"Because I did n't know it myself until a few weeks ago," he confessed. "Oléa, will you do me a favour? Will you go over and see her and patch up your quarrel?"

The sister thought it over, and with a sudden firm little resolve said she would. How and when this quarrel had arisen matters little, as the facts concerning it are not of the slightest consequence to this story. Besides, Heaven knows, we all have enough small scimmages of our own without troubling ourselves to hunt for more.

"And will you go to-day?" asked the brother.

"Why to-day?"

"Because I am going away to-morrow," he assured her doggedly. "For always."

Oléa looked at him in surprise; his face was always an open book to her, and now she studied it carefully. "No; you won't do that," she said with decision. "You may think so now, but to-morrow you will decide not to leave Aunt and me and all the other friends here. They are good friends, Ray. You have often threatened to go for ever, but you have never meant it."

"This time it is different," he declared, pacing the hearth-rug. "To-morrow I go to New York to engage a stateroom on some steamer bound for — for anywhere."

A certain unusual look of determination caused her to bring him back to the sofa and put her arms about his neck.

"No," she whispered. "No, Ray; you won't go — say you won't. Live here, live as you should, live for Adele. It's a coward who runs away after only once losing."

"Then call me a coward," and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I will not!" she ejaculated, her eyes flashing. "You yourself boast of our Norman blood. Live up to it. Would you stay for Adele?"



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He looked down thoughtfully. "Perhaps for Adele," he answered.

"A sister's influence is indeed small," mused Oléa. "I am sorry; unfortunately one does not influence much by loving, but by being loved."

Ray nodded carelessly, then he left the room, and walking out to the edge of the lower porch he looked off in the direction of the Minturn Homestead.

"It's hard to go," he muttered, and Oléa hearing him, came to the open window.

"You won't leave to-morrow, will you, Ray?"

On the second floor of the old Minturn house in a kind of diminutive tower at a corner (from which the mansion derives its name, — Torello), there is a room of octagon shape. One of its windows can be seen between two large evergreens from the library end of the Fabian porch. Ray gazed at it, and through the half-darkness he espied a profile silhouetted on the lower shade.

"No, not to-morrow, Del—I mean, Oléa. I shall wait a day or two."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VISIT TO MINTURN HOMESTEAD

**P**ERHAPS nothing is less characteristic of the average community than its burying-grounds, so dreary is their sameness the world over. But, of course, not for one minute may we speak of the population of Bristol as "the average community," nor of its graveyards as ordinary, for in death as well as in life this quaint New England town draws its class distinction clearly.

The road from Fabian Park to Minturn Homestead is lonely, the lifeless trees standing like sentinels for the dead before mildewed stones and crosses of old graves in the private burying-ground; very lonely, indeed, at night, when the sepulchres and marble slabs of high polish over newer mounds reflect the light by the roadside, seeming so silent and

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spectre-like, peering over the mossy wall as though to spy and prey upon travellers unwarned.

There are three graveyards in Bristol, — this one adjoining Fabian Park, another near Lemuel Johnson's tavern on the Warren turnpike, and a third in the town near the rubber works. The private cemetery for more than a hundred years has been the last resting-place of the aristocratic residents on the hill, including members of the Fabian, Kovington, Wainwright, Cringle, and Van Brunt families, two or three officers of the continental army, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and several other prominent characters of Revolutionary days.

The highway grave-ground — the most modern of the three — contains several generations of butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers, many prosperous farmers, and soldiers of the Union army whose sods are annually decorated on the thirtieth day of May with flowers by their sons, daughters, and widows, and with flags by the Bristol militiamen.

The third village burying-place rivals

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the one on the hill only in its antiquity, its moss and mildew; for it can boast of no handsomely-carved marbles nor polished crosses, — only of rough rocks taken from the wayside to be crudely labelled, and of many earth mounds unmarked by stones or names or dates. In this poor grave-lot cared for only by nature, with its tottering willows and elms bowed low as if mourning where men have forgotten, with its wild vines and weeds in place of wreaths and other proofs of memory, in this burial-yard, watered only by the narrow stream rippling through and by the rain, lie the factory workers, day labourers, road menders, clam-diggers, and fishermen, — from the first who set a lobster pot off Prudence scores of years ago to Dunstan, the patriarch scalloper, who died at the coming of last winter “unmourned and unprepared,” according to the declaration of his more righteous neighbours. This cemetery where Dunstan lies buried is the last home of Bristol’s masses. The graveyard on the highway, with its carefully trimmed hedges and well-kept paths, is the home of the departed middle classes; and the

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burying-ground on the hill, with the names of many gentle-folk on its stones, is the final resting-place of the aristocracy.

This aristocratic burial-ground seemed more than ever ghostly as Oléa hurried past it on the evening of the day when her brother confided in her. Its sombre silence, however, awakened no attention in her, for her mind was busied on the evolution of a plan. Therefore it was not fear of any meandering spirit that caused her to hasten past the graveyard around the corner; it was because the hours grew small and her eagerness great, and also perhaps on account of a slight fear that she might yet weaken in accomplishing her purpose. For her errand was very far from ordinary, and although of her own choosing, she had never found a mission less agreeable.

At Minturn Homestead she stopped, swung back the creaking gate, and hastened up the footpath.

Even with her hand upon the griffin-headed knocker Oléa paused. She was about to be so unconventional, so slavish to her impulse. "After all," thought she, "what right have I to interfere? I'll —"

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But then she let fall the knocker with a loud bang and stopped reasoning. The door was soon opened by a stooping servant with an old plaid shawl about her bent shoulders and a general suggestion of falling apart from age.

"Ah, Miss Fabian," she croaked, "what can bring you out alone and so late, too? Nothing serious, I hope,—no sickness? So many folks have been carried off of late. I do hope—"

"Oh, dear, no!" broke in Oléa, smiling. "I came over to see Miss Minturn. That's all."

"I'm relieved," mumbled the old woman, but with evident disappointment. "Come into the drawing-room, and I'll tell Miss Adele." Then she shuffled about, lighting the lamps in the faded gilt chandeliers with their hanging crystals and traces of by-gone splendour. "I wonder what the visit's for," muttered she to herself, as she painfully climbed the stairs. "They're not over-fond of each other, but p'rhaps there's going to be a reconciliation."

Comfortably clad in an old wrapper, Adele lay reading to her grandmother, her black

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curls rioting about her shoulders, her eyes bravely battling with somnolence, her little feet demurely resting one upon the other, with never the sign of a slipper near them.

"Miss Fabian 's downstairs, Miss, waitin' to see you."

Adele started in surprise; while her grandmother looked from her to the old servant as if her ears deceived her, and the old servant returned the glance questioningly.

"Alone?" asked the wrapped figure, coiling her hair.

"Alone!"

"Why?" asked the grandmother, in a pleasant, not unmusical voice.

"No idea!" cackled the servant, making an endeavour to shrug her shoulders, but with no success, for those bent members beneath the inevitable plaid shawl had long been affected with a chronic shrug.

"Very, very strange," observed the mistress.

"Very strange," murmured Adele, hurrying away to change her dress.

"Strange," echoed the ancient hand-maiden.

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A woman rarely thinks more of her appearance than when she is about to see one of her own sex who dislikes her. Adele took greater precautions to look attractive on the evening of this surprising visit than she had ever taken for a dance at the Yacht Club or some other equally auspicious occasion, and so kept Oléa waiting many minutes in the drawing-room, much to the discomfiture of the Fabian nerves and to the general ruffling of the Oléa temperament.

With due brevity we may quote one or two ordinary observations from the ensuing conversation to show by what a circuitous route of talk the main points were finally reached.

First ordinary observation: "Good-evening, Miss Fabian, I'm so glad to see you."

Second O. O.: "Thanks, Miss Minturn; I came for a little chat and to ask after your grandmother."

Third O. O.: "How good of you! What a pleasant night it is!"

Fourth O. O.: "Yes, is n't it?"

Then — awkward silence.



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Next—many more ordinary observations concerning the weather past and to come, prospects of a gay summer in Bristol, rumours of approaching marriages, dances, yachting trips, visits, and so forth.

Then—broken ice (by Oléa). “What an awful storm that was a night or two ago! Ray told me of your drive. I really have an object in calling,” she went on bravely. “I want very much to talk to you in confidence and to ask a question.”

“Yes?” (In a voice of inquiry, but little encouragement.)

“About Ray,” persisted Oléa, with indomitable courage. “I must speak of him to you.”

“Do!” returned Adele, with sham enthusiasm. “I suppose he has told you all.”

“Yes; *all*,” assented Oléa, beginning more than ever to dislike her neighbour. “He told me of your drive, of how you stopped at Green Tavern, of your meeting some Frenchman he used to know, and of —”

“The most fascinating man I ever saw,” broke in Adele.

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"Who, the Frenchman?"

"Yes — perfect figure, wonderful eyes, far more wonderful voice, and a manner that's — well, it's maddeningly attractive, and that's the only way to describe it. You know Ray introduced me as Miss Fabian."

"No; he never told me so."

Adele showed evident pleasure upon hearing of at least one incident that remained for her to mention.

"Yes, you see I was in such an awkward position that Ray had to call me his sister, and the worst of it all is he has asked the Frenchman to call; but, by the way, I don't believe he's wholly French; there must be lots of English blood in him. He's ever so strong-looking."

"What can we do if he does come to see us?" queried Oléa, rather incredulously amused at the other's enthusiasm.

"I'll still have to be Ray's sister," replied Adele.

"And who shall I be?"

"Why, you might be me," came the answer.

"How very funny!" they both said.

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"And quite interesting," observed Oléa.

"And very romantic," remarked Adele.

"Ray is always putting his foot in it," said the sister, beating around to the main subject. "You would have been so unwise to have accepted him; he is such a wild, whole-souled, hot-headed boy that he never thinks of consequences. You saved him."

"From what?" demanded Adele, evidently annoyed.

"From an impulsive act you would both have regretted."

"Which *I* most certainly should have regretted," rejoined the other.

By this time Oléa saw that nearly every word she had spoken had come unbidden from her lips. She had meant to be firmly and kindly inquiring; instead, she had been somewhat important, and in no way successful. So, without haggling of many words or diplomatic circumlocution, she came suddenly at her question and, throwing the flame of her eyes full upon her hostess, asked low, "Do you love my brother?"

"He is the only person in the world who

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could possibly have the right to ask me," was the retort archly made.

"I know it well," came the reply with no malice; "but I earnestly hoped you would talk freely with me." The woman was being lost in the sister. Never before had she been placed thus with another. Hers had ever been the vantage-point, — her custom to receive petitions, not to make them. Both with men and women she had ever been the one sought and not the seeker, indulging (except on this occasion) her great power of will to master those about her.

Adele failed to understand her neighbour's new manner, nevertheless it by no means displeased her to find Oléa, who until now had treated her with the utmost indifference (Oléa's way of showing extreme dislike), asking a favour. It would have been gratifying to her small amount of vanity and slight love of revenge to completely reverse their usual positions by being as vexingly frigid as Oléa had been on one or two previous occasions; but the small amount of vanity was so very minute, and the slight love of revenge was

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so infinitesimal, and she was so forgiving, so impulsive, kind, and ingenuous that Oléa's earnest manner went straight to her heart, and she grasped the sister's hand like a sorry school-girl in reconciliation.

"I can't talk freely with you," she declared, "because you don't like me; you don't approve of me." Oléa said nothing. "I can't be true and sincere with you, because you look upon me as untrue and insincere. I know, although your brother has never told me, how you and your aunt think of me. I know it instinctively, as I know many other things. My knowledge is all intuitive; it's not from books, study, or private lectures. How can I talk freely while you condemn me? For what? For nothing! For mad tomboy goings-on, for thoughtless pranks and frivolities."

Oléa began to wonder if she had not judged amiss. Yes, she had; and being all impulse to-night, "Call me Oléa," she said. "Let us be good friends in future. I have misjudged you and ask for your pardon. Let us do away for ever with petty disapprovals and distrust."

Adele grasped tightly the other's hand.

## The Minturn Homestead 97

So the reconciliation, croaked about by the Minturns' serving-woman, came to pass, and soon it bore fruit in the form of frank avowals.

"I will tell you truly," said Adele, at last. "I do not love your brother."

There was a varied feeling of disappointment, satisfaction, and triumph in Oléa's heart after this announcement: disappointment, because she felt that an influence — the only good influence, small, in truth, but solitary, would go from his life; satisfaction, because — well, the old feeling of dislike was not quite smothered in her; and triumph, because she had succeeded in her mission and learned the truth.

"The fact is," went on Adele, "as you know, Ray and I have grown up together and with never a thought of love. Why, it would take me years to imagine such a feeling, and even then I should n't love him; and even if I did I should n't marry him, and even if I married him I should never stop wishing I had n't."

Then Oléa said good-night with a sigh, the varied meanings of which are indeed

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hard to fathom, — half pleasure, half pain, perhaps, to describe them roughly. “I am very glad you have told me of your feeling for Ray, or rather your lack of the feeling he wants. His disappointment will be bitter — poor old boy! — he has n’t half the strength he should have — ”

“With such a sister,” broke in Adele, holding ajar the big door. “I’m awfully, awfully glad you came; after this, you’ll come often, won’t you? And I’ll come to see you. Wait a minute; I’ll call Jane to take you home. Now don’t forget, if you meet that glorious Frenchman, tell him *you are me*; I mean that we’re both of us neither of us — no; that’s not it, but you understand. Good-night.”

“Adele, my dear,” said the grandmother, later on, “you’re foolish. Just think of young Fabian’s fortune. Why don’t you marry him?”

“Just because I won’t,” answered the girl.

“How queer!” remarked the old lady, half to herself. “How unusual, how unambitious!”

## CHAPTER VIII

### A GOLDEN PUMPKIN

LATER in June the Bristol days passed by uneventfully; and not until early in July do we find anything happening in the Fabian family worthy of record. It was then that Adele Minturn, being by that time upon terms of intimacy with Oléa Fabian, one fine morning visited the Park on a mission of some importance; and then it was after the usual greeting and kiss that she asked a favour.

“You have heard me speak of my uncle in Vermont, — Uncle James, you know, the invalid. Well, I have a dispatch from his housekeeper, saying the poor old man is dying and all day asks to see me. Of course I must go, but to leave grandmother alone will be quite unheard of. She depends on me for everything; and if she is left to the tender mercies of old

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Jane, it will certainly be the death of her."

"Unquestionably!" broke in Oléa, laughing.

"So I've come over," pursued the other, "to ask if you—if you can't arrange to come and stay with grandmother for a few days. I shall be ever so much obliged."

Oléa acquiesced without hesitation, so deep was the hatchet buried.

"And when do you leave?" she asked.

"To-night, now that I know you will come over; but it is too bad" (and now the look of sympathy for the uncle changed to a little petulant air) "that I have n't a single becoming dress to wear, and I know lots of people up there. I have n't time to buy anything; everything goes wrong. I lost my new pink scarf on the beach last night and can't find it anywhere. What a pity it is I didn't know a week ago that I was going!"

Oléa could scarcely help smiling at her friend's characteristic forgetfulness of the real object of her visit.

"Oh," continued Adele, "there's another

## A Golden Pumpkin 101

thing. Crawford Blurdge was coming up to take me rowing this week, and I'm so busy packing that I won't have time to write telling him I am going away. But I don't suppose you will mind entertaining him an hour or so, will you?"

Oléa made a wry face. "No," she answered; "I will put up with him."

Then with many thanks Adele left her; and likewise let us leave the good old town to its even manner of existence, hieing ourselves to Newport for a glimpse of Montrecourt, noble employé of the title-mongers.

There can be no question that had the marquis possessed even the average allotment of masculine conceit, truthfully he might have written to Krauber that overquoted message of Cæsar: *Veni, vidi, vici*; but not being given to boasting he merely sent brief dispatches with conscientious regularity (always dictated to Pierre, mind you), telling of his progress, as, for example, in his last cablegram:—

"Think I have found a purchaser with all necessary funds."

Having after a few short weeks com-

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pletely captured Newport's mammas, Montrecourt found himself the busiest and most slavish man in the world. Invitations to all sorts and conditions of boresome social affairs flooded his mail, and with great integrity, together with an acute sense of honesty for the Syndicate, he accepted nearly all. In consequence his name appeared every day in every society column of every newspaper, and he is said to have led six cotillions in one week. Yet among them all there was n't a woman he cared for any more than for a new pair of gloves. But as two or three were estimated as heirs to millions, he dutifully began making straight the path for a courting.

Now, as every one knows by this time, the marquis was not the sort of man to receive hospitalities without returning them to the full extent that his income would permit.

He had chartered a small schooner yacht for three months, and an acquaintance with the usual American respect for titles, having by business been called abroad, had kindly placed at Montrecourt's

## A Golden Pumpkin 103

disposal for the summer a stable with ten or a dozen horses including coach and admirably matched four. So that the marquis entertained perhaps more lavishly than any of his competitors in the circle of noble foreign visitors, and with but small expense to the Syndicate. But as weeks passed by Montrecourt began to feel compunction, realising that in duty bound he ought to push forward his business interests. He reminded himself that he was engaged in a commercial transaction, sentiment not being permissible, and that to play for any stake other than the largest would be unjust, both to himself and to those who so very kindly — so generously — had invested in him. Now it so happened that the largest stake upon which the gallant Frenchman set eyes after a month's sojourn at the watering-place was a Miss — or rather *the* Miss — Flub of Flubdale, Michigan, worth ten times her weight in gold dollars, and that is saying a great deal. Miss Flub is not to be described (if we must obey Truth) as a rose, or a delicate fern, or any other flower known to the most learned botanist, unless it be a

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cauliflower; and as that is not a flower at all, we had better call her a vegetable, — almost any kind of ponderous vegetable; for instance, a robust squash or a thriving cabbage. Her figure was balloony, her hair sunflowery, and her voice — O Orpheus, what a voice! — with cadences not unlike those of a cheap phonograph. All the words of this chapter linked together chain-wise might just have encircled her waist, and all English adjectives of preponderance would seem inadequate in describing that which her father (raw ruffian, though truthful undeniably!) vulgarly termed “heft,” and which the cold observer, unblinded by gold, declared “dumpiness.”

Yet of course few remained unblinded; for, like some big gilded state-house dome, Miss Flub dazzled the little populace below, — the poor dear little populace grubbing so hard for its daily dollars.

Now of course the knowing reader will not place the hero among the poor populace merely because of the hero's attentions to Miss Flub (imagine a real aristocratic hero — and a Frenchman, remember — in

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such a plight!) But instead the reader of experience in these matters will readily see that Montrecourt's devotion for Miss Flub arose solely from his upright respect for the demands of business, and did not overpower him with the others who, like humble prophets of the East before a golden Buddha, indulged in one long, devout, almost continual salaam.

Although men had come and men had gone in nearly as large numbers as the summers of Miss Flub at Newport, not one had found favour in the eyes of the Flub family before the advent of the marquis. To him it was left to arrive (and all in a few short days) almost at the pinnacle of success. The reason is as plain as Miss Flub: she fell in love, yes, fell in love at first sight, or, to write more exactly, she bounced into it, as the football tumbles over the goal-post. And she loved him with all the weight, all the rotundity, all the exuberance that an opulent pumpkin might have for a star.

Moreover, she showed it, while he encouraged it with just the right glance now and then from his eyes (those wonderful stars

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in themselves), with just the right remark always on time, with just the right indifference, not enough to incur risk, and just enough inward disgust to make his suit a damnation and his heart heavy, for he had a heart somewhere, and it was not in his head !

One bright day at about the time when tongues wagged like puppy dogs' tails, when envy came to eager fortune-hunters and despair to the hearts of maidens, the trim schooner yacht, *Shoo-fly*, with her master aboard (Montrecourt, of course) and a merry company, set sail from Newport for Bristol Harbor. Miss Flub was the guest of honour, Mrs. Flub the chaperone, Mr. Flub acting in the capacity of Lord Chief Wine Consumer. So all the Flubs were on board with the exception of little Flub, or, to write with more dignity, Ephraim Flub, Jr., who was so excessively good, so fair and beautiful, so full of food and airs, that the pen of a poor wicked sinner scarcely dare aspire to a larger description. Let it be sufficient, therefore, to say that the ten-year-old Flub after many pro-

## A Golden Pumpkin 107

tests remained behind to drive his nurse and a goat with silver trappings, while the other members of his good family betook themselves to the *Shoo-fly*, for verily a son — even a scion like unto Ephraim Flub, Jr., — is not for one moment to be considered when a possible son-in-law looms up over the horizon.

Among others who as guests boarded the *Shoo-fly*, were several prominent hosts and hostesses, three *débutantes*, and one collegian, — names are unnecessary, for these play no part of the slightest importance in the story, and they are mentioned merely for the same reason that they were bidden come a-sailing, to form a background, like the inevitable villagers of rustic opera.

With great diplomacy (in which it has already been shown Montrecourt was a born master), the marquis, at all times and especially on this short cruise, paid court to Mrs. Flub, whom he flattered with all manner of subtleties, and whom inwardly he declared sentimentally stupid, ill-informed, and hopelessly *bourgeoise*.

While the daughter sat propped against



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the yacht's cabin like a huge cushion among many little ones, basking contentedly, the marquis, sitting between Mrs. Flub and his skipper at the helm, seemed wonderfully entertaining.

"Yes; Sappho's a beautiful name, Mrs. Flub. Was your daughter named after some relative, or was it just a pretty fancy of your own?"

"Partly both," returned Mrs. Flub; "you see, markeese" (she always persisted in using the feminine title), "you see Sappho is my name, too. I was first called Eliza; but when I grew up I began writing poems, so they called me Sappho after the mother of Venus."

"Oh, I see," observed Montrecourt, with an expression of supreme interest.

"And the name being kind of cute, I gave it to my daughter, though Ephraim wanted to call her Susan after his ma."

The marquis smiled to show satisfaction at the thought of Mrs. Flub's success. Sappho Flub moved restlessly among the cushions, with her bulging blue eyes demanding the host's presence at her side, a position which was easily arranged, for

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Montrecourt had a wonderful knack of managing trivial things, and soon Mrs. Flub was left to the guileless collegian.

About halfway between Mount Hope and the light-house at Bristol Ferry stands an old dock just south of Minturn Homestead, where captains sailing east of Bristol often land.

A short distance from here Montrecourt cast anchor. He had not proposed, and he deemed himself cowardly for his procrastination. In the past fortnight several times the very words had been upon his lips; but the lips had stayed closed and he had deferred the pleasure until the day of this sailing party. Now again he had put it off until after lunch, — that delectable lunch on the yacht, where Ephraim Flub intemperately drank, where Mrs. Flub bored the poor collegian, where the three *débutantes* fluttered their laces and lowered their eyes before Montrecourt, whom Miss Flub monopolised, where every one seemed to talk and act heedlessly, with more gaiety than thought, but where, in reality, all the men (perhaps excepting the collegian, who loved all the three *débutantes*)

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had in view an object, and of course this object was Sappho Flub; while all the women also had an aim, and of course this aim was the Marquis Montrecourt.

Time has obliterated exact details of the manner in which it happened, but it certainly did come to pass, (with what unlooked-for results we shall presently see), that Montrecourt's unqualified success and a certain hauteur of expression brought rancour to the heart of the collegian and a spark of opposition to the eye, seeming to say in that collegiate language so diligently imbibed from the classics, "Just watch me lay for him!" And this procedure was not long in coming, an excellent chance being offered immediately after lunch, when the marquis suggested that the party land, in order (as he said) "to kill an hour or two on shore." But his real aim, of course, is obvious. A stroll on the beach, a half-hour on some comfortable rock by the water, a question asked with eyes not on the person at his side, but scanning the far horizon of blue sky and green shores across the bay, and perhaps, after all, Montrecourt's courage

## A Golden Pumpkin     I I I

would not be overtaxed, so he told himself. Yes; that it needed courage even this man frankly confessed, this man whom one might well imagine smiling at death and deeming it the cleverest joke of all.

Strange to say, the only guest of the company outside of the Flub family partly to divine Montrecourt's plan was the collegian who was "laying for him." (Surely Revenge has a thousand eyes.) Therefore, when the captain's boat set out for land, Sappho Flub found the collegian close beside her. And even after an hour on shore full of disparaging hints — broad as this massive maiden — requesting by many a snub the collegian's absence, despite many a wily manœuvre on the part of Mrs. Flub, the marquis and Sappho never for one moment found themselves *tête-à-tête*. Thus it ensued that Montrecourt, with the utmost grace, and perhaps a secret thankfulness at heart, returned the collegian's revenge with large interest by leaving that youth and Miss Flub entirely to their own diversions.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH FATE BLINDFOLDS THE HERO WITH A PINK SCARF

MONTRECOURT stood upon a hill-ock, several rods from the water, looking down at his party on the beach as they strolled about in pairs, save Mr. Flub, who, thanks to his position as Lord Chief Wine Consumer, dozed peacefully on a rock. And as the marquis stood there regretting that his duty to the guests demanded his return, suddenly, from over a knoll at his left, he heard a very slight and very feminine scream. Instantly the thought of his guests was gone, giving place to this possible chance of death to his *ennui*. So he mounted the little knoll with some alacrity, and looking down into a diminutive inlet partly bordered with drooping ferns and branches his eyes beheld a most unusual sight,—a sight rather pitiable and unhappy, yet withal the most ludicrous in the

## A Pink Scarf 113

world. For there, scarcely a short stone's throw from shore, rested a small, frail row-boat fast upon a rock, her bottom stove in and the tide gently rippling over her gun-wales. And about midway to the beach stood a forlorn-looking, dwarfish fellow, making vain struggles to bring to land in his arms a rather portable burden, all the more difficult to carry, because being a girl it laughed with much merriment over the situation. The little man made no head-way, but stood still, in fear lest by stepping forward he might trip and fall. His position was certainly more defensive than aggressive, yet the utter despair, apprehension, and lack of power further to exert himself, all graphically expressed on his little rubicund face, showed clearly that he might be down in another minute. There was no chance of a serious mishap, the water scarcely reaching to his waist; but Montrecourt, now near by, fully determined that the combination of plaid and fichus and ribbons displayed was far too pretty and fine of texture for use as a bathing dress. Besides, he caught sight of so small a russet shoe and so daintily hosed an ankle that he vowed

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they should not do service for wading purposes. Therefore, with never a thought for his own shoes, into the water he walked with as easy and unconcerned an air as though strolling on one of the boulevards. As he approached the unhappy pair, the weak little man, with great beads of perspiration coming from every pore, swayed to and fro more than ever; meanwhile the girl, seeing that now she was really in imminent danger of a tumble, became serious, and hearing a call from Montrecourt she turned and looked towards him, for the first time, with some confusion. As he saw her face, the marquis came to a halt, standing stock-still, regardless of the water now over his knees. It was the face from the Bois, the face disturbing, haunting, unforgotten; but in an instant retrospection was gone, and the demands of the moment became paramount.

He stood within arm's length of the shipwrecked couple, remarking calmly, "Now, sir, if you will kindly hand me mademoiselle, I shall be glad to take her ashore for you." Whereupon the small man tried his best to grant the request;

but on holding out the burden in his arms, he had not the strength to maintain his foot-hold, and in an instant both must have fallen. Montrecourt, however, being most able-bodied, as we know, and capable of quick action, made no attempt to take the girl from the other fellow's arms lest they should drop her on the way, but, instead, with something of an effort, reaching forward, he lifted both the unfortunates quite out of the water, then, showing only the smallest exertion, he carried them to land.

And now safely on the beach, the rescued twain found themselves in a more embarrassing position. For out in the water the momentary excitement of their plight had rendered conventionalities quite out of the question; whereas now they must needs stand on their dignity. And to see the little round man (Crawford Blurdge, of course) make this endeavour was surely one of the most ridiculous sights imaginable; all the more so because he regarded his rescue with the poorest grace possible and a surprising ingratitude. To have had the girl saved from his failing arms by another man would have been a sore enough



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wound to his surpassing vanity, but to have himself also picked up like a miserable infant brought the bitterness of gall. So without even offering his hand to the marquis, there he stood for a minute, altogether mirth-provoking in his appearance. Montrecourt thought he had never seen such blear, bluish eyes as that pair sourly inspecting him from under strings of faded hair, like the eyes of some queer fish beneath the seaweed.

After muttered thanks and sundry excuses for the carelessness of his accident, in which the small man tried to show clearly that it was not at all his fault, by observing, "If the tide had been higher we should have been drier" (a remark which he evidently considered highly humorous, if we judge from an accompanying guffaw); and after Montrecourt had declared that doubtless the rock was also to blame, and after the girl — Oléa Fabian, of course — had thanked Montrecourt in the prettiest manner conceivable, the small man turned abruptly on his heel, and the two went over the meadow and up the hill.

The marquis sat down upon a stretch of sand and looked out on the water. Being a man fully capable of confronting vexing truths if he so wished (a rare desire on his part), he wondered how long he would be able to laugh that face away from his thoughts, and, above all, those dark unfathomable eyes. But presently his chain of thought led to a chain of bondage, the dainty, exquisite miniature, Oléa Fabian, fading into vagueness before the broad, preposterous, ungainly caricature, Sappho Flub. So he stood upon his feet again and started back towards the *Shoo-fly*. As he turned once, he looked back over the fields, up the hill, whence the unlucky pair had gone, and he saw the girl entering the large door of an old-styled, rambling house, and he saw the man walking away from her down the road towards Bristol village. Then, with many apologies and excuses for his twenty minutes' absence, he rejoined Miss Flub and the others. Yet after starting for the yacht with his party in a small boat, he once again put back. For a soft winding pink thing of

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silk, like the clinging scarf a woman wears about her head on summer nights, was being carried ashore by the little waves, and he saw it. The pink thing could scarcely have been brought around the point from the scene of the shipwreck, there being no stronger tide and the stranded rowboat being several yards nearer to the beach than was the point. Hence, to have gained its present position near Montrecourt's boat, the scarf, conceding that it had been dropped at the time of the mishap, must first have been carried out to sea, then around the small peninsula, then in towards shore again. Although he noted the improbability of this, Montrecourt wanted the pink thing, for in some way it seemed to have connection with the face. So the marquis, ordering his men to row alongside of it, took it from the water.

"May I see it a second?" quoth the collegian, and Montrecourt handed it to him. In one corner there were the two small embroidered initials, — "A. M." "I thought I recognised it," remarked the collegian. "It must belong to Miss

Minturn, — Adele Minturn. She probably dropped it on the beach and the tide washed it away."

Montrecourt took it back, and folding it put it into his pocket. "Where does Miss Minturn live?" he asked.

"In that rambling house," came the answer of the collegian, who had visited Bristol once or twice before. "Up over the hill; you can just see it among the trees.

"I will send it to her," observed the marquis, carelessly, and they all boarded the yacht.

It was this method that Fate, the merry prank-player, first used to make Montrecourt mistake Oléa Fabian for Adele Minturn. In Green Tavern some time before it had given him to believe, through Ray as a mouthpiece, that Adele Minturn was Oléa Fabian, and now the deception, being doubled, was complete.

The *Shoo-fly* returned to Newport, and still no word of importance passed from the marquis to Sappho Flub.

For the next few days the Frenchman made various inquiries in a casual sort of

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way regarding the Minturns of Bristol, and he had little difficulty in learning much concerning them. Being among the oldest land-owners in Rhode Island, they were known by report, if not personally, for miles around. He heard that the present occupants of the once beautiful homestead were an old lady and her granddaughter, who was poor but pretty, and who, so he told himself, was of course the maiden of the rowboat and the Bois. For some fathomless reason it greatly pleased the marquis to know that she was poor. Perhaps this reason grew partly out of his knowledge that her poverty placed her fully beyond the pale and the pall of his business arrangement with the Syndicate, — the Matrimonial Syndicate, L't'd; to which he sent regular weekly letters, giving terse but rather encouraging accounts of himself. These letters were never written in his own hand, but dictated to Pierre, who, having always been a faithful servant, was implicitly trusted by Montrecourt. So far the valet remained silent as the grave.

## CHAPTER X

### MONTRECOURT AND OLÉA

**I**NSTEAD of sending the pink scarf to Bristol, the marquis took it there himself. Yet he did not define his reason for taking it, his customary cool method of calculation being for a time relegated to the four winds. Perhaps it was not quite consistent with his business duties to procrastinate his ordeal with Miss Flub, perhaps it was not quite fair to Krauber even to waste a day in gallivanting after an ungilded goddess, and perhaps by so doing he might be tempted to slight seriously his financial obligations, perhaps it might even ultimately lead to his downfall as a fortune-winner ; yet although these possibilities hurried hazily through his mind, we repeat that he gave them not a moment's earnest consideration, but went to Bristol. He had known many impulses in his life to which he had yielded, yet the submission

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had been wholly voluntary and made with open eyes. Therein they differed from this impulse, for while by them he had been impelled, by this one he was almost compelled.

At all events, early on a July afternoon he arrived by train, Pierre accompanying him to look after his baggage, and for his luncheon he repaired to the house of the Bristol Yacht Club.

Now on this same afternoon Ray Fabian, who had delayed his departure from Bristol, thanks to his sister's remonstrance, appeared at the Yacht Club in quest of good cheer and boon companions, with whom to make war upon the blue imps haunting him. He found the club-house comparatively deserted, except for two or three members who, in fair weather or foul, no matter what the season or hour of day, could be seen lounging in one of the comfortable wicker chairs in the card-room, or standing around the worn-out and hilly billiard-table, or in any other of the Yacht Club's half-dozen idling places.

The diminutive Mr. Crawford Blurdge, looking all the smaller contrasted with his

giant armchair, glanced up from a magazine as Fabian entered the library, — so called because it contained a score of dusty paper-bound novels, and a desk with reams of note-paper elaborately emblazoned by Bristol Yacht Club pennants, and the initials B. Y. C. in a wondrous gilded monogram. For the books the members cared little, but upon the Yacht Club paper they never tired of corresponding.

“Ah, Ray, my boy; glad you’ve dropped in!” observed Mr. Blurdge, nodding his head once forward and once backward as though the action pained him. “But, Raymond, your look of despair would bring hope to the heart of an undertaker. What’s up?”

He was always very nice, very cordial and pleasant-tongued to Raymond, but of course Raymond’s money had nothing to do with it!

“Nothing’s wrong,” returned Fabian, rather curtly. “Any one else here?”

“Only Greenfield and that marquis we spoke of the other day. He’s been put up for a week.”

“Have you met him yet?” asked Ray.



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"Um—er—well, I have n't been introduced," returned the other. "I've heard of him in Newport, of course."

Ray laughed bluntly, as if he knew much more than he chose to talk about, which was quite true, for Oléa had told him the story of her shipwreck, and from the description of her rescuer he had easily recognised the Frenchman. Then Montrecourt himself came into the room. Fabian introduced him to Blurdge.

"I believe," said the marquis, with a bow and the very faintest suspicion of a twinkle in those marvellous eyes, "I believe I have not only had the pleasure of hearing of Mr. Blurdge from Miss Flub, but also that we've met before."

Blurdge squirmed in the armchair, then assented with one of those painful nods.

Montrecourt turned to Ray. "My dear fellow," said he, "the sight of your sister that night is still in my eyes. I call her Princess of the Raven-curls."

That villanous blunder born in Green Tavern began to get in its work.

Blurdge started in surprise. "What!" he exclaimed. "What did you say?"

## Montrecourt and Oléa 125

"*Mon Dieu!* of course I said raven-curls, and what else would you have me say?"

Blurdge, his mouth wide open with astonishment, looked at the marquis and was speechless. The mention of black curls in connection with Oléa Fabian was so utterly preposterous! Surely Montrecourt was chaffing him. It was an insufferable piece of effrontery! And unfortunately the marquis seemed quite out of his grasp, for only this morning he had received a letter from his friend Rolierre declaring Montrecourt to be the gallantest, saintliest, most respectable of men.

These were the thoughts that hurried through Blurdge's little brain (remember, little brains are sometimes very sharp, like little tacks), that hurried through his head before he chanced to look up at Fabian.

Now, Ray, of course, for the sake of Adele, wished to maintain the deception. Therefore as soon as he caught Blurdge's eye, he managed to stand half behind Montrecourt, and by all manner of winks and head-shakes to impress upon Blurdge the advisability of showing no further surprise,

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But no sooner had Mr. Blurdge perceived the anxiety of Fabian than the whole truth of the case dawned upon him. Oh, yes; now he remembered, for he had n't been a hundred thousand miles away from Green Tavern that night. Not a bit of it. What a very funny state of affairs! He must thoroughly understand them. Wait a minute; that blessed Frenchman regarded Adele as Oléa. Well and good — extremely amusing! Hence (in all probability) that blessed Frenchman also regarded Oléa as Adele. Splendid! Capital! He would like nothing better than to carry on the deception; it is so gratifying to deceive a successful rival, so amusing to make mischief for Mischief's sake!

Although the writing of these delightful thoughts has not been done in a minute, they caused but a very brief pause in the conversation. For Blurdge, who could be deft with little emergencies, instantly began (as our friend, the guileless collegian, would have said) to crawl quickly, or — in slangless language — to retrace his steps with care but due celerity.

## Montrecourt and Oléa 127

He turned to Fabian and, still maintaining his air of perplexity, asked, "Why in the world should the marquis have thought that?"

"Thought what?" demanded Ray.

"That your sister was a New Haven girl, — Princess of New Haven girls. Heavens, don't make it so bad as all that, Monsieur, — or have the Americans been twisting your geography for you? it's a way they all have with foreigners." He said it with the most ingenuous air the Blurdge countenance could possibly assume. Ray Fabian, who instantly understood the tactics, for the life of him could not help admiring the tactician. He laughed boisterously, while Montrecourt smiled in great amusement.

"No, no!" exclaimed Fabian, carrying on the manœuvre, "not of New Haven girls, Crawford, my boy; Princess of the Raven-curls, that's what the marquis said."

"O-o-oh!" ejaculated Blurdge, instantly doing away with his puzzled expression. "A hundred pardons, my dear marquis, my slight deafness is always fooling me. New Haven girls! What an ass I am!"

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Then the marquis smiled away the subject good-naturedly. He could do anything with that smile: he could plead or lead, demand or reprimand; but he seldom or never laughed. Yet his smile was of the sort that is almost heard.

A dull conversation caused another half-hour to pass slowly, then Greenfield came down from the billiard-room.

This Greenfield would have been in every way a usual sort of mortal had he not had a side of his character which protruded — or rather, obtruded — beyond all others. This was his sensible side. It is safe to say the world has never known a more sensible man. His common-sense seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere about him, making the air thick and heavy and difficult to breathe. It is just possible that he was really almost too sensible, — too overwhelmingly, ponderously, unfailingly sensible, — too conscientious (as Blurdge said) about administering to his acquaintances great over-doses of common-sense.

He filled the position of assistant editor on a Providence daily newspaper of which

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Mr. Herbert Mortimer, the Fabian executor, was "sole owner and proprietor." And it must be acknowledged out of justice to him that fifty times over did Greenfield earn each dollar he ever made. From this it will be seen that, besides being sensible, he was earnest, faithful, and plodding. But that he himself always lived on the common-sense diet which he so readily prescribed for others is a matter of some doubt in our minds, remembering as we do how his eyes now and then wandered skywards with a sort of far off, longing look, only to come down to earth again very mundane, indeed, yet almost contented. And from this it may be gathered that he worshipped Oléa Fabian from a distance, reverently, hopelessly, unavowedly; and that he looked upon Adele Minturn with a familiar air—nearly satisfied. This is quite enough to say about so ordinary a creature. Dear me! what more remains to be said? The little world did not love him; it did not pity him; it did not dislike him; it did not even laugh at him,—it simply stamped "sterling" all over this man, who (to quote Blurdge

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again) should not have been named, but numbered.

"Have you been playing billiards alone?" asked Ray.

"Yes; practising."

"Did you beat yourself?"

Now, of course, any one with merely the average amount of common-sense would have made some answer quite as absurd as the question, or would have smiled indulgently at the tomfoolery and said nothing; but Greenfield, being so ultra-sensible, looked at Fabian in all sincerity and asked, "How do you mean?"

This little query, more than all possible analysis, shows just why the world, instead of admiring him as a wonderfully sensible person, called him a stupid bore. Nevertheless, among them all there was one who substituted for the general verdict of "very stupid" her own decision, "very literal," speaking of his doggerel as poems, of his "hack" work as art. And her reason for loving him was (in her own words to herself), "Just because I do."

The advent of Greenfield in no way adding brilliancy to the conversation, and

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Montrecourt being unbearably bored, the Club "library" soon held Bluridge and Greenfield its sole occupants. Then Bluridge succumbed before the vast emittance of common-sense, and Greenfield fell asleep in a wicker-chair. Now, if there be any truth in Bluridge's assertion that the more level-headed a man is, the louder he snores, we need no further proof of Greenfield's common-sense than the harmonious nasalisms from the wicker chair. But before leaving this dreamless young man to his sensible nap, let us not forget to record that he had dusty, moth-eaten hair (not poetically long, but only fringy about the ears), speechless grey eyes, rusty-rimmed eye-glasses, and a general appearance of unshapely heaviness, like a joint of beef before a man with a quail appetite.

And now we have ended the disagreeable but honest task of telling the plain uncoloured truth about one of our characters, who is neither a hero nor a villain, nor anything else in particular. So let us hurry away from him, quickening our steps in order to pass Bluridge on his way



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home (of course we don't bow cordially to the rascally wag!), in time to see Fabian and Montrecourt turning the corner from Fish-Hawk Hill, as they stroll towards Minturn Homestead.

Fabian is about to comply with the bold Frenchman's request and introduce his sister, *alias* "M'lle. Adele Minturn." The huge joke of it all lightened his spirits; but there is many a calamity that springs from laughter.

That he might not bring the talkative servant to the door and so risk discovery, Ray went in without knocking, leaving the marquis on the veranda. And presently he came out again, followed by Oléa Fabian.

"I want you to meet Miss Minturn," said he, addressing Montrecourt; then turned to his sister: "Monsieur Montrecourt has brought you one of your lost belongings."

Of course, instantly there was mutual recognition, Oléa seeing before her the man who, in the most debonair manner describable, had lifted her and Crawford Blurdge completely out of their watery

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predicament, while the marquis looked upon the only face which had penetrated him a little deeper than his passions or his admiration.

Ray almost immediately contrived to leave on the poorest pretext imaginable, for his depression had come back upon him suddenly, all moods and happenings being sudden in this man's life, and he was in no spirit to avoid bungling.

"I have brought," said the marquis, bowing, "a scarf I found on the beach that day which I believe belongs to Miss Minturn. Let me restore it to its owner with thanks for the opportunity." And, drawing it from his coat, he handed it to Oléa.

"The thanks should all come from me," she returned, smiling. "That was, indeed, a gallant rescue from an awfully unpleasant position. I've never before been so embarrassed."

She came out onto the porch and sat in the hammock, while he stood, hat in hand, seeming to leave unnoticed her praise of him, but showing by the expression of his face, and a word or two, how much he regretted her mishap.

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"Nevertheless," remarked he, "I cannot help thanking the gods for it, because if you had been all safe and sound, the chances are that I should never have seen you again." She smiled, but so little that for once he found compliment nearly wasted.

"What do you mean by *again*?" she asked. "Had I not screamed childishly, I think you would never have seen me at all."

"Oh, yes, Miss Minturn," replied he, seating himself on the veranda steps. "I saw you months ago on the Bois in Paris." Now, the fact that he had not forgotten her, although the first sight of her must have been merely a glimpse, seemed a much greater compliment than its predecessor, — the more so because it came unplanned, — and the flush of her cheeks showed it was noticed.

"Yes, I was visiting an aunt in Paris last winter. You live there, don't you?"

"I plead guilty; but am I so unmistakably Parisian that one must know it after two minutes' conversation?"

"No, indeed; from your accent and

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physique I should say you were more than half English."

"True; I believe there is a good deal of Saxon blood in my veins. But may I ask you, Miss Minturn" (he could not resist the temptation), "how you knew I was in France?"

She rocked the hammock with her foot. She did not for a minute want him to fancy she had inquired about him. "You were described to me by Mr. Fabian, a friend of mine, and to see was to recognise you, of course."

"Ah, yes," rejoined the marquis. "I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Fabian and his sister."

"You met both Miss Fabian and me under extraordinary circumstances," said she, much amused. "And with Miss Fabian you evidently found favour." She considered this very entertaining,—this conversation with the under-meaning she alone could comprehend.

"I implore you not to flatter," said he. "But, tell me, do you know my friend, Mr. Fabian, well?"

"Almost as intimately as though he

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were my brother," she answered, then thought to herself: "That is not saying he is n't." Now, in judging of Oléa's veracity, the scrupulous reader perhaps will repeat that old saw about the devil and the stump. This, however, would be really an injustice on the reader's part; for be it observed that although Oléa in this instance obeyed only the letter of the law of truth, she much disliked, for two reasons, to disregard its spirit. The first cause was her innate frankness; the second arose from a quite unaccountable aversion she had to giving this man an utterly false impression of herself. Therefore, the reader, knowing that the girl would have found it far easier to have told Montrecourt the whole truth, and appreciating her unselfish thought for Adele in not doing so, must bury for ever his devil and his stump in thinking of Oléa Fabian. For let it here be written, never to be questioned, that her principles were firm as the coast-rocks, and high beyond the capacity of metaphor to measure them.

Now is there any need whatsoever here to set down an hour's unimportant conver-

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sation held by these two merely because it happened to be the first after their meeting, merely because they are the central figures of the history? Is it necessary to follow the manner of some novelists and write of those small manœuvres made by the man (much as we admire his cleverness), or the gracious, graceful replies from the woman (much as we love her beauty, her intellect, and her surpassing sincerity)?

“Not necessary,” we answer; for all the world knows their talk while it was yet only a formality. Therefore let us not only pass over that afternoon, but over another and another, and then over a fourth, and so on, until we are come to the days of September, to the goldening and reddening of the trees and to the days of great discomfiture, pleasure, and perplexity in the heart and mind of the Marquis Montrecourt.

It was much as if he were riding upon a see-saw, for now he was up near to the skies with Oléa, now he suddenly came thumping down to earth again, thanks to the weighty influence of Miss Flub. Now he was in Bristol, now in Newport; now

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he obeyed his powerful inclination, now he followed the dictates of his natural integrity. Now he sat thoughtless, careless, dreamful, bound by the spell of Oléa's eyes, — those omniscient eyes that mirrored the autumn and flattered it; now he looked with disgust and hollow compliments into the shallow eyes of Sappho, and nerved himself for the barter. So we can readily see that one day he was saying, "To the devil with Krauber!" and the next, "To the devil with myself!"

Strange to say, the sight of each woman drove him to the other, — Miss Flub immeasurably heightening his admiration for Oléa, and Oléa by her fascination causing him all too plainly to realise his imminent danger in her direction, and the necessity of at once proposing marriage to Flub, that the honesty of his contract with the Syndicate might at all sacrifice be maintained. Thus it may be seen that each time he called upon Oléa his slow courtship of Sappho grew a thousand times more odious and more essential, while each time he endured the presence of Miss Flub, Oléa's magnetism grew a

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thousand times stronger and more irresistible.

Montrecourt loved Oléa Fabian, and to himself frankly he confessed his love. It was not a passionate desire, not a fatuous worshipping of a face, a figure, or a voice. Rather was it the first honourable, powerful affection of his life, and it was utterly without hope.

For, being, as we have suggested, capable not only of small social puppetry, but also of broader and deeper action, Montrecourt had feelings. And being not merely a study in light colours, but also a student of denser shades, Montrecourt had thoughts.

So let there be no doubt as to his love for the one woman and his firm determination to marry the other.

He still knew Oléa as Adele Minturn, the deception having been maintained after many hazardous and narrow escapes from discovery. Oléa still remained at Minturn Homestead, the real Adele having prolonged the visit at her uncle's, where (as she wrote) it was of course very sad indeed, because he was *so* weak and deli-



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cate, — the poor old man, — but then she was having a beautiful time, perfectly delightful, even if she had lost her new pink scarf and had no pretty clothes to wear.

The day upon which we now come face to face with Oléa and Montrecourt is the day whereon the real Adele returned to Bristol; for it marks one of those narrow escapes mentioned above.

It happened in this wise: Montrecourt and Oléa were strolling through the old orchard, — red it was and golden as a sunset, — while the man was endeavouring to disguise his feelings and the girl was attempting to understand her own. They had little to say, for they had come to that stage when words grow less and less essential. What they did say, however, was made up of a thousand small personalities, — apparently insignificant. And who will not recognise this stage?

As they sauntered aimlessly hither and thither, suddenly there came a little feminine voice from the driveway calling, “Oléa, Oléa Fabian!”

Now Oléa knew the voice to be Adele’s,

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but she was so taken unawares by the sound of it, that, back she called, without an instant's thought, "Yes, here I am." Then she saw her mistake. But fortunately the marquis came to the rescue. "She is not calling you," said he, "but Oléa Fabian, Ray Fabian's sister." By the luckiest chance imaginable, Adele was not visible from her position beyond the orchard. Immediately Oléa, taking in the whole situation, realised that Adele was coming towards them. If Adele came into view, Montrecourt would unravel the whole fraud. So Oléa, after exclaiming, "Oh, was n't she asking for me?" turned back into the orchard, trusting to Fortune that Adele might see before being seen.

And Fortune favored her. This was a narrow escape.

We do not know the exact course of their conversation that afternoon, but certain we are that some words of more than ordinary importance must have passed between them — perhaps the marquis found the disguise of his feelings unusually hard to wear — for when he arrived late at the Yacht Club, where he was staying,

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Pierre received immediate instructions to pack the trunks and to buy tickets for Newport.

And it is of a certain Sunday there that we are now to tell.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SECOND SIEGE OF PARIS

**L**ATE on that Sunday afternoon the Marquis Montrecourt boldly turned his face towards the Flub mansion, the doggedness of his step, the hard expression of his eyes, showing his firm resolve to have done with an unpleasant undertaking. Strongly disliking the average Frenchman's manner of dress, Montrecourt appeared as usual in a perfect suit of latest English design, displaying to advantage his figure, — that wonderful figure which caused passers-by to turn and to admire.

On the broadest green lawn of Bellevue Avenue, where live the Flubs of Flubdale, Michigan, Montrecourt espied young Ephraim bounding towards him, chortling gleefully. And wherever the beauteous Flub child went, there also went trouble, so the marquis, although inwardly shuddering, showed a fearless front and has-

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tened to the house with no attention for the goblin. But, alas for the visitor! Ephraim, Jr., was too violently aggressive to admit of his being ignored. So on he came, having eluded the watchful eyes of his nursery governess (poor patient soul!) — on he came in his Fauntleroy suit, running after the manner of a small pig, and welcoming his prey in a voice like that of the aforesaid animal — on he came like the conquering hero, and, lo! in a twinkling the marquis became captive.

“Goin’ up ter see Sis, ain’t yer?” queried the goblin.

“Yes, Ephraim, my little man,” returned Montrecourt. “I hope to find your sister at home.” He made a brave endeavour after easy self-confidence. It is safe to say that E. Flub, Jr., was the only masculine mortal our hero ever really feared.

“Oh, she’ll be in, sure enough,” quoth Fauntleroy Flub. “I guess she’s expectin’ yer, cuz I heard her talkin’ to ma this mornin’, and she said, ‘Ma, I think ter-day ’ll be the day. He’s comin’ and there ’ll have ter be a climax!’ Say, markeese, what’s a climax?”

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"A climax, Ephraim; why, a climax is a *dénouement*."

"A what?"

"A *dénouement*."

"I thought," observed the goblin, pensively, "that Sis spoke of it as if it was a question."

Montrecourt strode on rapidly without replying, while Ephraim bounced along at his side, remarking, "And I guess it's you that's goin' to ask the question." The marquis frowned. They were within a stone's throw of the house. The nurse, having at last caught sight of Ephraim, came hurrying up to them.

"Here, Master Ephraim," said she, "come away," and she laid a hand on his arm. But he ducked his head, and in so doing fell and rolled over quite beyond her reach. Moreover, he rolled so hard that he turned quite up on to his feet again several yards away, making all manner of wonderful grimaces. The woman humbly apologised to Montrecourt and started in pursuit.

"And I know," yelled the goblin at the top of his voice, "what the question is,

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and it ain't hard ter guess what the answer 'll be." Then he rolled over again in his joy, but this time the Fates did not bring him upon his feet, so that he lay on his back in much the same plight as when a turtle lies in a similar position, frantically shaking arms, legs, and head, in a vain effort to rise, until the nurse came and caught him.

Then there came to the marquis a feeling of relief and of great rejoicing.

But there are some days in our lives when each new step brings a fresh trouble, and so it was on the afternoon of Montrecourt's important visit, for then occurred the onslaught of the Flubs, the second Siege of Paris.

Flub — Flub — Flub — all was Flub, and all was trouble. But to give these misfortunes in the correct order of their happening, let us discover, on the spacious piazza of the Flub palace, Mr. Flub seated comfortably, having on a brand new velvet-reen smoking jacket (with the Flub crest on each brass button), and smoking a black cigar of great size and price. Of course Mr. Flub is not awaiting the arri-

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val of a visitor; of course he expects no one this afternoon!

He held out a coarse-grained paw when Montrecourt came up on the porch.

"How are you?" said he, and there was a sort of genuine ruffianly heartiness in his manner. "Sit down and join me with a pint." He touched a button on the railing beside him, and in two minutes a resplendent butler appeared.

"A small bottle of the finest and driest," ordered Mr. Flub; "and here, count, have a cigar." His notions of the foreign nobility being exceedingly vague, he constantly misapplied titles. In his democratic brain he had visions (and some small knowledge gained by acquaintance in Newport), visions of counts and earls and dukes, but for the life of him he could not assort them, — it was an overwhelming titular hodge-podge! In characterising his brain as democratic, we refer to that part of it which still remained unwarped by the snobbery born of his wealth. The average man styled by the world "self-made" either makes every endeavour to appear a great stickler for



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the social lines and proprieties, or he ignores them with ostentation. And so it will be seen that whichever his method, like all other extremists, he overreaches his mark.

Mr. Flub, being no exception to this rule, but rather one of its chief exponents, we are hard put to it for a new manner of describing him. There was, however, something so gorgeously spectacular and exaggerated in his splendour that, after being reminded of Newport's little melodramas, its little tragedies, its little farces, we are, by way of comparison, pleased to call him — its big extravaganza.

"Glad you stopped in, dook," said he, — "I mean, *markeese*, for the sight of your face is a pleasure to my whole family. That's the truth. Why, even little Ephraim likes to have you come, and —"

"Yes," assented Montrecourt, meaningly, "yes, d'you know I really think little Ephraim does like to see me; such a bright, lively little fellow he is too, besides being —"

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"But," interrupted Mr. Flub, with a knowing whisper and a covert wink at his wine, "but, my dear count, to quote the words of the vulgar song: 'He is not the only one, oh, dear no;' and to use an expression of quite pardonable slang, 'There are others.'"

The marquis assumed an air of unspeakable perplexity.

"All of which means," continued Mr. Flub, "and of course you know it, you foxy feller, that my *son* is not the only member of my family who regards your visits with feelings of pleasure."

"It is indeed very kind of you to say this; but really, my dear Mr. Flub, I —"

"Come now ! come now !" exclaimed Ephraim, Sr. "No denials, you know ! I ain't blind."

The marquis began to wish himself a thousand miles away from that Flub mansion,—a thousand miles away for good and all. If the son was a goblin, the father was an ogre, and Montrecourt was the victim of both. Had Mr. Flub been less effusive, less gushing, less vulgarly cordial even to a minute degree,

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then the Frenchman's stamina might not so sorely have been taxed. But to-day's reception, first by the cub and next by the bear, fagged out his determination.

Nevertheless he kept bravely onward.

"If you are so flattering, my dear Mr. Flub," said he, "so flattering as to refer to your daughter as one of those others who welcome me here, I am glad."

Old Flub nodded his head reiteratively, and emptied the bottle of "finest and driest."

"And, by the way," continued the marquis, "speaking of your daughter, — is she at home now? I am hoping to see her this afternoon."

At this those crested brass buttons on the Flub waistcoat began merrily to dance up and down, while the florid Flub countenance showed signs of uncontrollable laughter. "Is she at home?" queried Mr. Flub. "Ha, ha! well, you're a funny cuss, count. Haw, haw! your jokes'll be the death of me some day." Then he leaned over in a confidential manner towards Montrecourt. "Just as if you did n't know she'd be waiting to see you. Well, I never!"

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"But," remonstrated the marquis, "my dear sir, I assure you —"

"'T ain't necessary," broke in the burly buffer (as Blurdge called him); "not at all, 'cause I don't b'lieve you. Why, you and Sappho are the cutest, foxiest couple I ever laid eyes on. I says to her the other day, says I, 'How's it coming out between you and him?' 'Not at all,' says she; but, bless you, I could see by the red in her face how anxious she was."

The marquis tried to appear very incredulous and pleased. "And how about *my* feelings?" said he, whereat Mr. Flub laughed again as though another of those irresistible jokes were attacking him. "My dear dook," he returned, recovering his breath and once more becoming confidential, "I knew if she was anxious, you was, too."

"I see," said the marquis, but without smiling, for at some moments in our lives even a counterfeit smile is as far beyond our reach as the moon. "I must go and look for Miss Flub," observed the marquis, and with that he entered the house.

Then a troubled expression came over

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the face of Mr. Flub. "Wonder if I put my fool foot in it?" said he to himself. "Here's the first dook Sapph's at all took with, and I hope she don't let him slip, but there's no telling. Here, William," he called, ignoring the button for his man. "William," said he when the butler appeared, "what's the price of that wine?"

"Can't exactly say, sir, but it's pretty 'igh."

"Well, William, after this, whenever me and the count are drinking alone, you bring a cheaper brand, no matter what I call for—understand?"

And this little incident goes to show only two things,—that even an extravaganza may have penurious spots in it, and that Mr. Flub was beginning to lose faith in a pet ambition.

In the meantime Montrecourt in the drawing-room occupied an uncomfortable tapestried sofa, dismally, doggedly awaiting Sappho Flub. But her mother came before her.

"My darling Sappho will be right down, markeese," said she, all a-flutter. "What a

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pleasant surprise, to be sure! It really adds to the loveliness of the afternoon. We had no idea you were coming." Never before had her manner been so full of treacly sentimentality. "But of course I don't say that we were n't hoping so."

At this the marquis managed to smile as though he were saying, "Now, my dear Mrs. Flub, d'you know you really are flattering me; I've never been so complimented before in my life."

So this little smile, like a myriad other little smiles in Society, was an untruth.

She came over to the tapestried sofa, on which they both sat down; and for five minutes she talked of the beautiful day; nature appealed to her so strongly, of course. Said she, "It awakens all the poetry in my soul —"

"I'm sure — very, very sure it does," that was what he interpolated. "Syrupy doggerel!" — that was what he thought.

"All the poetry in me," pursued Mrs. Flub, adopting a dreamy air, — "just as it does in Sappho — dear Sappho." She glanced towards Montrecourt to see

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whether or not he was assenting to the endearment.

To tell the truth, he might have been amused had he not been abused, but never before had he encountered so much difficulty in cloaking his thoughts and feelings with his expressions. Yet even now he contrived to make his eyes respond and say, "Yes, *dear* Sappho."

And it was merely another wordless lie.

Mrs. Flub, being completely deceived by it, however, would doubtless have proceeded even further on her way of investigation, had not the gorgeous white-and-gold door of the drawing-room (price, \$5,000!) thereupon opened to admit Sappho Flub, dazzling with a scheme of decorative splendour similar to its own. We say similar, for there is no denying that Miss Flub (like the door) was gilded heavily, and who will aver that she was not hand-painted? In one particular, however, we find an unquestionable difference. She was not enamelled! Now, some readers, knowing as they do that Miss Flub had long passed her blossomhood, may have their doubts in this matter. "The door

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was enamelled when new," say they; "the woman when old." But in remarking thus they appear near-sighted. For although we confess that regarding some women this might have been said truly, we cannot for a moment allow it of Miss Flub. And our reason is readily to be understood; for the faces of most women (and of men, too, but we now have woman for our subject, as, indeed, when have n't we?) sooner or later must wrinkle. That is true as it is trite; but the faces of these become concave, while the faces of others become convex, and surely it is the former class which needs the enamel, and surely Miss Flub, being of the latter, did not need it: for who can picture the serenely florid, sublimely bland cheeks of Miss Flub having a crease in them, any more than one can conceive of a nice good-natured rubber ball with a permanent dent.

But enough of this! We are spending as much time over Sappho's ample countenance as Sappho herself had just spent before a mirror over precisely the same difficulty.

"It is such a pleasant surprise," said she



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to the marquis, and then with a sort of giggling elephantine coquetry, "Of course — he! he! — of course I did n't expect you, did I?"

Upon this Montrecourt sweetly smiled, while Mrs. Flub, being possessed in large quantities of that tact which is so obviously tact that it is not tact at all, soon left the couple to themselves. And as she went out her heart beat high, for was there not to be (as Ephraim, Jr., had said) a climax?

In the large window of the drawing-room, facing the broad expanse of Flub lawn (already mentioned as the gambolling ground for this young rascal), there stood one of those "S"-shaped chairs, termed by Mr. Flub a "tater-tater," and made for the occupancy of two, sitting face to face. Towards this vantage-point Sappho led the way, while the marquis followed. He was striving as he had never striven before to assume the superficiality which, until these last few weeks, had only awaited his slightest beck to come to him. Yet even now — on the apparent brink of his damnation — his manner and expressions remained happy in the eyes of the eager

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woman who saw him. Perhaps, however, they were more than ordinarily ardent; and perhaps this was the direst falsehood of his life. Yet he was scrupulously obeying the provisions of that contract, which, questionless in his mind, admitted of no honest breaking.

For only an instant, as he sat there contemplating with marvellous skill the words and gestures and glances of an undeclared admiration, for only an instant he gave the matter a final weighing in his mind. On one side of the scales lay the whole of his heart for one woman, together with his feeling of repulsion for the other; while on the other side he found certain small visions of a few paltry satisfactions which the acquisition of a vast fortune might bring to him. And, far more weighty than these, he found on the same side the agreement made upon his word as a gentleman, together with his intense desire to be rid of his debts and of Krauber. It was precisely as that wily German had predicted, — Montrecourt's honour and his honesty were now placed in diametrical opposition each to the other. But it was not at all

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as the marquis had pictured that night in his Paris club, for the woman in the case was utterly intolerable.

Nevertheless, the scales made no even balance, for slowly and surely down went Honesty, sending Honour higher than a kite.

There are times when men cut short the approach of Death by hurrying to meet him. Perhaps this is the best method of abbreviating an inevitable pain. Presto! and, as the Frenchman would have remarked — *tu es mort!*

So Montrecourt abridged his irrelevant conversation with Miss Flub.

Now, whether or not his honour was buried so deep as to admit of the wonderful imitation of love-making of which he was doubtless capable, we are spared the necessity of saying, because — surprising as it may seem — the woman took the initiative. And can we blame him for the sin that was unsinned, even though it were meditated? Some of us will; others will not. It is a question old as the hills and open till the end of Time.

“Do you know what ma says?” in-

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quired Sappho, after the preliminaries. "Oh, ma is so comical! She actually thinks that — no, I sha'n't tell you, 'cause I can't, I really can't tell you, marquis, but she does have such preposterous ideas! Now don't you call 'em preposterous?"

"Why, Sappho," said he, "if I only knew what you meant I might agree with you."

"Can't you — now can't you possibly guess?" she cooed.

The marquis shook his head thoughtfully.

"It's about me — about us," and she lowered her eyelids clumsily.

"About us!" he exclaimed, feigning surprise and the deepest interest. Perhaps there would have been more bravery in plunging himself headlong without leading her on, but his heart was too sick for the courage. "What about us? Tell me, Sappho."

Then she fixed him with her eyes, fat eyes, if we may use the adjective in this connection, and he cursed the inventor of *tête-à-tête* chairs. "Give a guess," she persisted, laying a stubby hand on his arm.

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"Does she think," asked he, "there is some understanding between us?" By this time he had achieved a surprising tenderness of manner and voice. But beneath the surface he was grimmer than Death. He rested his hand upon hers, — not to caress, but to screen. "Dear Sappho," said he, "am I right?"

She looked at him with much the same preponderance of yearning in her face that a whale expresses to its mate.

And he wondered if very, very stout people ever really loved.

"Yes, that is it," she murmured. "Is n't it absurd?"

Her back was towards the window, therefore, as any one with any knowledge of *tête-à-tête* chairs will readily see, he sat in a position to look out upon the broad green lawn.

And that was just what he chanced to do after her last question, while he was managing to appear doubtful about the absurdity of it. Now as he looked in this direction he saw upon the driveway a most lively combat in full progress. For there, a few hundred yards away, Ephraim

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Flub, Jr., struggled valiantly for release from the tireless arm of his long-suffering nurse. And with each new endeavour the dear child succeeded in coming nearer to the house. But as yet his chances for escape were scarcely bright, so hardened were the woman's muscles from continual training. Then, for the first time in sweet little Ephraim's life, Montrecourt secretly and sincerely wished him good fortune. For there is in us all a certain nameless prayer at times that some outside influence would come and burn the beds of our making. And the marquis hoped that Ephraim might now be this "outside influence," — an angel in a goblin's guise.

"No; I do not think," said he, with a side gaze at the broad green lawn, "or at least, really, Sappho, I *hope* it is not absurd. Tell me, have you not seen all along —" (here he noticed that Ephraim had broken loose and came rushing forward), "have you not known, Sappho —" (the marquis dropped his eyes to watch the lawn from their corners, and he drawled his words) "not known that I —" (gad; the boy — the darling boy was doing splendidly —

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only another second and —!) “that I am madly, desperately, hopelessly” (never before had he so loved adverbs) “yes, Sappho, I —” and then a glass door opened, admitting a goblin head from which came the shrill announcement, “Sapph, the other one’s comin’; ain’t it funny? Wow!”

Whereupon, with an embarrassed, yet beautifully majestic air, Sappho Flub arose to her feet and to the occasion. And she upbraided that poor little fellow until her face grew red and his nurse recaptured him.

Then she returned to the chair, regaining her usual sweetness and docility. “What were you saying?” she asked, but it was too late, for by some oversight on the part of the servant — although Miss Flub always blamed Ephraim, Jr., while the marquis inwardly praised him for it, — by some oversight a visitor was admitted unannounced by the butler, and this visitor was “the other one.” How in the world he managed to pass the Flub lines outside remains to this day untold, but we all have our opinions, dear little Ephraim.

“Why, how d’ you do, Crawford?” said

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Sappho, trying her best to seem amiable, though not for the visitor's sake. "Mr. Blurdge, d' you know Monsieur Montrecourt? Monsieur le *Markee*, this is Mr. Blurdge."

At this the two men declared the pleasure — the great pleasure — of having met before; and in ten minutes Montrecourt had gone to his home.

Thus the agony was prolonged.



## CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH NARRAGANSETT BAY, ASSISTED  
BY THE ELEMENTS, CAUSES TROUBLE

**W**E have shown in a preceding chapter the reactionary effect of Oléa Fabian and Sappho Flub upon the unfortunate marquis; we have mentioned how the sight of each drove him to the other. Yet never before the Sunday just recorded was this reaction so sudden and certain in its result.

For, lo and behold! bright and early on Monday morning we find Pierre busily packing his master's trunk, while the steward of the *Shoo-fly* is buying provisions for an immediate sailing.

So intense, however, was Montrecourt's desire to be once more in Bristol, that he put no trust in the winds to take him there. Thus it was that he gave his captain orders to bring the boat as soon as possible, while he himself went by train.

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And for once he wished to be rid of Pierre, in order that for at least twelve hours no material reminder of Paris might be with him. Therefore Pierre remained to follow in the *Shoo-fly*.

Now, as this good yacht was about to start, the valet having put off from shore in the yawl for the last time, there came upon the dock that scheming little personage, Mr. Crawford Bluridge. His brow was dark and his manner pompous, but he concealed the cloud, showing only the blatancy.

"Hi there!" called he. "Put back a minute, will you?" And Pierre, recognising an acquaintance of his master, granted the request.

"Is the marquis aboard?" queried Bluridge, as Pierre mounted the dock's ladder.

"No, M'sieur, as M'sieur will soon see if he looks aloft for the absence flag." For Pierre, having been on at least a dozen cruises, prided himself most enthusiastically on his knowledge of yachting rules and etiquette.

Bluridge paid no attention to the inno-

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cent gibe. "Where are you bound for?" he demanded; and when the ready answer came, he continued: "Well, look here, my man, Monsieur Montrecourt invited me to sail over with him to-day. Ten to one, he's forgotten it. But I should like very much to take the trip. Would you mind going back to his rooms and asking if he has any objection?" And he held out a coin to the valet.

"But, M'sieur, I am sorry; the Marquis Montrecourt has already left for Bristol by train,"—a fact of which, of course, Bluridge had full knowledge beforehand. Crafty Mr. Bluridge!

"Now, that is too bad," quoth he, seeming much put out, "and here I have brought my bag—well, it can't be helped, I suppose."

Then, like all faithful, polite, French valets, Pierre did what under ordinary circumstances would have been just the right thing. And for Bluridge it could not have been better, but for Montrecourt—well, we shall see.

"If M'sieur does not object to a slight scarcity in the way of delicacies, I know

## Narragansett Bay 167

my master will feel greatly offended if M'sieur does not come aboard and let us take him to Bristol."

So the upshot of it all was that Blurdge, after apparent reluctance, at last consented to this plan, and became a spy on the enemy's craft. With the crew and captain, all of whom he had known long before Montrecourt's arrival in America, he was very liberal. We have previously shown his ready adaptability among men of inferior birth. Now, as never before, this stood him in good stead. But what he said and what he heard on board the *Shoo-fly*—thanks to the cupidity and intemperance of Pierre—needs no detailed chronicling. It is to be shown only in its outcome.

Upon arriving in Bristol the marquis repaired at once to the Yacht Club for lunch before starting for the Minturn Homestead.

Here he met Greenfield, whose hours of work on the Providence paper being from seven in the evening until two in the morning allowed him full freedom in the daytime.

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So the marquis and Greenfield lunched together ; and it was at this meal that plans were laid for a pleasant little cruise on the *Shoo-fly*.

" I suppose you know two or three people you would n't mind asking ? " observed Montrecourt, " and be sure and come yourself. We shall start the day after to-morrow early in the morning and bring you back in time for business. I shall ask Miss Minturn and Ray Fabian — "

" No," broke in Greenfield, " not Ray Fabian. Have n't you heard he left suddenly last night for New York ? Sails for Europe on Wednesday."

But the marquis showed little surprise, Fabian having mentioned his desire for roving the world over and caring not especially where.

" Says he's going around the world," continued Greenfield. " I don't see any sense in it. Now, the sensible thing would be work. Ray ought to work, but he has n't a grain of common sense in him. I should not be surprised, though, if he had some of it banged into him sooner or later. He'll lose all his money, mark my words ; then he will have to work."

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The marquis may have agreed in thought, but he said nothing. This man Greenfield was as intolerable a bore to him as to every one else. So he hurried through his lunch, and with an "All right, then, you'll bring four or five men and girls, and meet me on the Old Dock at nine on Wednesday," he left the table and the Club.

Then Montrecourt walked quickly — very quickly — to see Her.

Of course he started for the Homestead. Had he reached the house, however, he would not have found Oléa, but only Adele, the former having returned to Fabian Park.

Thus again the deception narrowly escaped discovery; for now as on so many previous days the prankish Fates once more played into the hands of the deceivers. Whom should he meet, on his walk up the hill, but Oléa herself coming towards him.

He turned, and they sauntered together towards Bristol Village.

Never before was her thralldom so mighty and complete. Yet still he did not tell her.

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Indeed, that very morning before leaving Newport he had cabled to Paris, "Goods will certainly be sold this week at big price."

Now if the first cruise of the *Shoo-fly*, on which went the Flubs and certain fluttering goslings, forms an interesting chapter in this narrative, the second cruise gives us an all-important event. And as these great happenings are all too scarce in our field for exploration, we pounce upon it with due alacrity, by hastening towards the old dock this windy Wednesday morning. Yes, it was windy; and if we are at all worthy to be called sea-dogs, we shall doubtless pull our sou'westers over our eyes and look off over the waters with some show of caution and hesitancy. For this was exactly what Montrecourt and his captain were doing at the dock's end before the arrival of the guests.

"I think it'll be all safe, sir, with a double reef," remarked the captain, "if the ladies don't mind plenty of water over our lee." At this moment Oléa arrived, and the marquis looked at her inquiringly.

"Oh, let's try it," said she, turning her

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face with enthusiasm full to the wind. "I love it, and I don't believe the others will mind much."

So that settled the question.

Then a most unexpected visit, or perhaps we would better say visitation, came to pass. For coming up the roadway towards the dock, who should appear, heavily laden with wraps, waterproof coats, and all manner of indispensables, but Mr. Greenfield, Mr. Crawford Blurdge, and *Sappho Flub*!

For a single moment the Marquis Montrecourt stood aghast and showed it; but the very next second he was again as tranquil and smiling and cordial as only the marquis himself could be.

Here was a pretty state of affairs and no mistake, — the two fires joined together, and our poor hero in the very heart of it all. Of course there is no need of any detailed telling how *Sappho Flub* happened to be there; for knowing her as we do, it is the easiest thing in the world to picture to ourselves that awful mixture of impatience, ardour, and sweet maidenly affection which caused her to seek her beloved one.



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To aid her in this purpose, she found no one more useful than Bluridge's sister, a poor diligent housekeeping creature of whom we have made no mention, partly because not a single soul ever thought of doing so. Miss Flub was at present enjoying to its utmost the enforced hospitality of Miss Bluridge. "Oh, my dear Miss Bluridge, it was so good and kind and awfully lovely of you to ask me!" this was what the gushing, scheming Sappho had said immediately after her arrival, and we have not the faintest doubt whatever that the overpowered Miss Bluridge really believed she had asked her.

Nothing is more curious than the ease with which a deception may be maintained, although circumstances and surroundings would seem to make certain its speedy discovery. It resembles the case of the criminal who is safest by proximity to the scene of his crime. No suspicion of Oléa Fabian's deception regarding her identity was brought by Montrecourt's guests to his mind. For,

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as we know, Blurdge found a malicious delight in offering no enlightenment and Greenfield having been let into the secret as usual considered it sensible to follow where others led. As for Miss Flub, she had never seen Adele or Oléa, and so was as readily fooled as Montrecourt himself.

Montrecourt introduced Oléa as Adele Minturn, and it is safe to say that never before had Sappho's eyes been bulgier or more glaring. Oh, for how many monstrous horrors is the demon Suspicion responsible!

Now let us pass hurriedly over the first hour or two of this eventful voyage, — the many awkward moments, the strained efforts at conversation, which served to make its beginning doleful and deplorable in the extreme. And let us thank the weather which in its pleasant moods gives us such good opportunities to talk when there's nothing to say; let us thank it for its present turbulence which threw the whole party together (literally) whether they would or not.

For by noon a great sea was raging,

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and the looks of the captain, now steering a homeward course from some five miles south of Prudence, were as dark as the sky.

Blurdge, true to his naturally discreet instincts, remained below in the cabin, inwardly quaking with fear, yet even now not forgetting the formulation of a plan for the complete overthrow of his rival. But more of this later; for it is the deck of the *Shoo-fly* which demands our attention. On this we find the captain and mate kneeling at the helm, and the rest of the crew springing here and there, catlike, over the stays and halyards, to manage the closely reefed canvas.

Oléa, loving the storm for its very might, stood with Montrecourt on the windward gunwale, holding fast to the rail. Miss Flub, although half frightened to death, would not allow her fears to carry her below, or for one minute leave the marquis and Oléa in this highly interesting position. Greenfield crawled gingerly about, trying to help the crew.

Now we have previously shown that the ponderous common-sense of Green-

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field when applied to himself was apt to be questionable. It was so in this instance. For on a sudden, while he was vainly endeavouring to make fast a flapping tarpaulin, the captain gave his familiar cry, "Hard a lee!" but, alas! it escaped the ears of Greenfield. And so when the boom came over with a mighty swing, it caught the land-lubber in the middle, swung him far out beyond the deck, and dropped him into the water. As he went upon this little excursion, he showed that excellent sense of his by shouting loudly. Thus it was that Montrecourt, Oléa, and Sappho, who were quite near to him, heard him call before he went under. Unluckily, like innumerable men who spend their lives by the sea, he could swim no better than a tenpenny nail. Oléa, knowing this, told the marquis; then quick as a wink she threw open the hatch and went below for a cork cushion. Instantly Montrecourt's coat was off, and he broke the lacings of his shoes; for the sea was running big as mountains, and, powerful swimmer though he was, he knew it

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would tax his every muscle. In the meantime (and this was not over ten seconds) the face of Sappho Flub actually grew pale as death with anxiety and love.

“Don’t, oh, don’t!” she screamed; “don’t risk your life!” Then as he was on the very point of going overboard after poor Greenfield, now struggling valiantly several yards astern, Sappho came to him like a tigress and flinging her arms about his neck would have restrained him with every possible violent entreaty. She called to the crew; she called to the captain; but the crew being forward on the lee side, had seen none of it, while the captain knew that to leave his wheel would be madness.

Then Montrecourt acted with immediate decision and in a most unusual way, which must have shocked Sappho even more than it surprised himself. For, quickly putting his hands back of his neck, he unclasped hers, and seeing that all words were ineffectual he calmly, with all the politeness possible in the circumstances, grasped her arms and impelled

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her backwards towards the hatchway. Here he raised his hands to her shoulders, and bearing down thereon he gently but with wonderful rapidity and resolution, pushed until her feet alighted on the cabin floor.

Then he closed the hatch and dived into the sea.

Few other men would have had the strength for it. Even to this day Montrecourt can scarce believe the picture his memory makes, — the picture of three or four desperate strokes, of Greenfield's hand stretched towards him in supplication, of the giant swells and great valleys among the waters, of the vice-grip about his neck, and the rescue almost miraculous. The endeavours of Montrecourt in this record, or any other which may describe them, will number barely half a dozen, yet of each a success was the outcome. Indeed, had his attempts been as numerous as those of the average man, Heaven only knows to what pinnacle he might not have attained.

But to come back to that poor devil of a Greenfield shivering on the deck

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of the *Shoo-fly*, more dead than alive; they worked over him like good fellows, — marquis, crew, and the captain too, — stood him on his head, moved his arms up and down, and finally put a little breath into his lungs and much whiskey into his stomach. Then they undressed him, bundled him up in blankets, and took him below, where he fell asleep, weak as a kitten. For once the common-sense was clean gone out of him!

Montrecourt gave an order or two to the captain, a glance to Oléa, another to Sappho (very different!), then descended to his cabin. "Here, Pierre, a suit of clothes and a cocktail, both very dry, if you please."

Now let us go back a few minutes to a scene perhaps not quite so thrilling as this wonderful rescue, but infinitely more ludicrous, more important, and more unusual. For nothing is so customary in novels as the saving of somebody from a watery grave, — indeed, I wonder how Montrecourt could have been guilty of so ordinary an action! In fact, he raised the whole affair above the level of the commonplace only

by that unceremonious shove of Miss Flub down the hatchway. It is to the moment of that shove we now return.

What a pleasant, happy, comfortable little gathering that was down in the cabin! All the guests so nicely assembled! Miss Flub in a towering, overpowering, stifling rage; Mr. Blurdge in as great a bewilderment, wondering what the deuce it all meant anyway; and Oléa, after the manner of women, guessing the truth in an instant! Up she went with the cork cushions and threw them overboard (it matters not that they did n't help one bit — they would n't have been life-preservers if they had!); then when the marquis and Greenfield were hauled up over the side, she was the one to get the whiskey and the blankets, and to lend all aid possible in the emergency. Luckily, the speed of the wind slackened for a time, and she was quick at catching the ropes to support herself, or there might have been another ducking for the marquis.

Meantime affairs took a very unexpected turn in the cabin. See now how rage defeats itself! For rage, like sorrow, often



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seeks sympathy. The rage of Miss Flub sought the sympathy of Mr. Blurdge and found it.

“Crawford,” said she between her teeth, and her cheeks were as red as a cooked lobster, “Crawford, ugh! ow! um! how I loathe him! I’ve never dreamt a woman could be so insulted—so outraged!” then she gasped for the breath her wrath had taken away.

“Tell me, and I will kill him,” gurgled Blurdge, beside himself with joy. Nevertheless, he made no immediate attempt at onslaught upon the Frenchman, but sidled along the cabin sofa until he was very near to her. Presently she grew calmer, while her face became as set and rigid as its flabbiness allowed.

“I hate him, loathe him, despise him!” she purred. Blurdge’s arm started upon a trip around her waist and made fair progress considering the distance of the journey.

“Why?” he murmured.

“Is it not enough that he has insulted me?” she demanded dramatically.

“It is enough,” quoth Blurdge, wisely.

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"Crawford," she continued, and revenge was indelibly written on all the rotundities (we cannot truthfully call them features) of her face. "You have asked me a dozen times to marry you: make this man pay for his outrage — and — I am yours."

"Dearest — my darling little Sappho," cooed Blurdge, in ecstasy. "How sweet of you, my precious! Don't be afraid; I know of his other villanies, and his downfall is already prepared. I did it to save you, — entirely for your sake, my darling."

"Did what?" she queried in astonishment.

"Just wait a little while," he answered knowingly; "then I shall have a pleasant surprise for you. Dear me, what a nice little surprise!"

Then, as previously chronicled, the marquis came down, bearing Greenfield in his arms, and that was the end of the conversation.

Alas, alas! how often love is turned to hatred quite as strong!

Montrecourt never proposed to her: circumstances made it impossible. Perhaps if it had n't been for that shove he

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would have done so, — perhaps not. Now, however, the die was cast irrevocably by the words of Miss Flub as she came on deck and the *Shoo-fly* dropped anchor in the cove at evening.

These were the words : “ Monsieur Montrecourt,” and her face was one immense smile of pleasure, “let me present my *fiancé*, Mr. Blurdge. I hope you will be good friends, such awfully good friends, for my sake.”

Surely there has never been a more thoroughly congratulatory air than that with which the never-failing marquis greeted this announcement. He grasped Sappho's hand, then he grasped Blurdge's, wishing them in the most polished, yet hearty terms all manner of happiness, and the prosperity which none but thorough-going villains may enjoy on this paradoxical planet. Meantime, of course, the two were secretly wishing him all the ill-fortune which only the true hero may have in a similar position.

Then this memorable yachting party dispersed, Montrecourt walking up the hill with Oléa towards Minturn Homestead.

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As the reader may have noticed, Adele Minturn was not among those who went a-sailing this eventful summer day. There was method in her absence. She had sent word of "a bad headache" as excuse to the marquis, that the concealment of her identity might not be further jeopardised.

The marquis, however, had signified his intention of returning to Newport this very evening.

Oléa felt that it was coming all too soon — that departure — as they climbed Fish-Hawk Hill.

A few stars shone; the wind sought other regions; the moon used fleecy clouds as a feather fan to hide her face and flirted with the world.

Montrecourt's conversation was more than ever impersonal. The release from one woman gave him no right to the other. He was still bound by contract, the bond of debt, and the remorse created by the light of her high goodness cast full upon the evil of his life. So it was that his sight of her soul's wondrous whiteness, intensifying the darkness of his own, made a

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comparison than which there could be no greater hell for him either in this world or the next. Evil being face to face with Good, it loves to find in that view its own eternal punishment. Thus our very heavens are also hells, and it may be so hereafter.

Oléa walked on over the hill to the Homestead where he supposed she lived. At the door of the house, while he bade her good-night, he bowed over her hand for an instant as though he would have kissed it. Yet he forbore, still standing thus for several seconds with never a word or movement, like one in the deepest of all true reverence and prayer.

But in an instant more he turned away, with nonchalance, with a smile, with a look so wholly fashioned by the froth of his surface that even no slight word of detention might come from her, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE EPISTLES OF CRAWFORD BLURDGE

CRAWFORD BLURDGE sat alone in the writing-room of the Bristol Yacht Club late into the night. After spending several hours amid a medley of schemes and cocktails (each the cause and effect of the other), he must have been well pleased with his plans and the goal of his thoughts just reached, for he sat down to write, having an expression which seemed reeking, so to speak, with satanical satisfaction. Yet there were traces of doubt in the blur of his eyes. Nevertheless, he began his epistle.

MY DEAR RAY,— Although you gave me your address in Paris and asked me to send you now and then the news of Bristol, I think you will be surprised to hear from me, for you know as well as I do that the “news of Bristol” seldom amounts to more than the pettiest trifle

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concerning Mrs. Tom, Dick, or Harry, about whom we don't care two sticks.

Now, however, there is news indeed, — news which compels me to write ; news of certain happenings which I feel it is my duty to have you know and consider. Therefore I would write only were it as man to man ; how much more as friend to friend !

Well, then, to come straight to the point : that French marquis (and I am as doubtful of his title as of his reputation), Montrecourt by name, has become an ardent suitor of your sister, for whom my esteem is unbounded. You know him ; but I am sure you are not aware of the facts regarding him which I have in my possession. The series of this damning evidence, however, is not yet complete ; and so I have thought that you, being in the very city where the wily gentleman comes from, might make investigations which, when brought to light, would save your sister from a terrible *mésalliance* and lifelong unhappiness. I am sure that you, in whom there is so strongly a brother's love, will be glad to take *immediate* steps towards bringing about your sister's salvation.

But Blurdge was not sure. He threw down his pen and leaned back in his chair, frowning deeply. There were misgivings mixed with his malevolence.

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"The aim will not be strong enough," he muttered. "To be certain absolutely that he will act instantly, I must appeal to more than the brother in him. He will not do it for me as a favour to a friend, he is too lazy for that, nor for Oléa now. He may, yes, probably he will, write to her first; that is the weak point, — the defect in the whole arrangement."

Then Blurdge rang to have his glass re-filled, which he immediately re-emptied, thereupon looking off thoughtfully into space, or perhaps he was praying to the devil!

Suddenly his brow cleared; and if blear can become brilliant, his eyes almost shone with the lust of success.

Surely the devil had answered. For, alas! it is so desired, and replies come up as well as down.

The thoughts of Blurdge flew back on the wings of his wine to the Green Tavern and the scene therein enacted on that stormy night, which fills a chapter or two in the beginning of our story, and is the cause of this whole narrative being written.



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His memory recalled Ray and Adele Minturn as he had seen them from his hiding-place. Montrecourt had not then arrived. The glow of the stove had shown Blurdge their expressions. The look of love in Ray's face remained caught in the trap of Blurdge's brain. And now, as the captor sat alone writing, the captive secret was to be freed, that in its turn it might pursue its prey like the falcons of old from the falconer.

"I will appeal to the lover in him and to jealousy. Brother love, indeed! Child's play! Besides, he cannot write to *Adele* about it. He will be busy at the game in no time. He will be so eager to hurt the Frenchman that I shall have to use the curb more than the spurs. Let's see: in my first plan my underlying motive in writing to him (for which of course he would have just enough sense to look) was my love for his sister; now it must be explained otherwise. Ah, I have it: sycophancy — casual mention of Adele — good!"

Whereat Blurdge again took pen in hand and wrote: —

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MY DEAR RAY, — A somewhat unpleasant affair has occurred here in Bristol which makes it necessary for me to write to you. It seems that the Marquis Montrecourt, a Frenchman spending the season in Newport, who is an acquaintance of yours and a great friend of mine, is about to be proposed for membership in the Bristol Yacht Club.

There will be a meeting to elect members within a month, at which I am hoping the marquis — best fellow that ever was! — will be admitted.

But another friend of mine whose name I am really not at liberty to mention has heard certain damaging and scandalous stories concerning Montrecourt from Paris. On the strength of these I fear the marquis will be black-balled.

But if I can positively disprove the truth of these assertions, I am sure I shall succeed in saving our foreign friend from such unwarranted treatment.

I turn to you, for you are in Paris, and I know you will be glad to make investigations. I think these will put you to little or no trouble. There is a man named Rolierre, who lives at 49 Rue Laffitte. Tell him you have heard the whole story about Montrecourt and the reason for his visit to America; take him to dinner and give him wine; then I can assure you if there is anything to say against Montrecourt he will say

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it. Tell him Montrecourt has told you all and broken the agreement made in Paris, and talk as knowingly as possible. But do so only when he is alone with you and when he has been made confidential by wine. Now this request may seem very queer; for it cannot at present be wholly understood by you. My friend, however, who threatens to black-ball the marquis, has insisted that this method shall be pursued. He is fully satisfied that we shall in this way ascertain all there is to know about the Frenchman, whether good or bad; and if there is nothing ruinous to his reputation disclosed, my friend promises not to black-ball. He wants me to tell you the whole story in order that you may make Rolierre talk; but if it is true, Heaven knows you will find it out soon enough, and if it is not, it is well buried and you will have done us all a service. And so now that I have refused to do this, the would-be black-baller suggests that I tell you one or two things to say, which will at least give you the appearance of having complete knowledge of a certain affair. Among these things you might mention in an off-hand way "the creditors," "the heiress," "the goods for sale," and Montrecourt's telegrams to Krauber. And, by the way, beware of this man Krauber; for he might tell malicious lies about Montrecourt, but I am assured that Rolierre is honest. Above

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all, I know that I can rely on you to treat this matter in the strictest confidence, and in advance I claim your word as a gentleman, saying that you will speak of it to no one but Rolierre until you hear from me again. You and I want these calumnious reports cleared up. We want the Marquis Montrecourt exonerated from certain preposterous charges. He is an honourable man, and now that by living in Bristol he is to become one of us, we must maintain his honour.

Moreover, it is only just to Adele Minturn, to whom he is ardently devoted, that we should take steps to avert this disgrace.

With hopes for success and an immediate  
reply, Yours faithfully,

CRAWFORD BLURDGE.

Stretching himself and yawning, little Blurdge critically surveyed his letter. And in those bluish stagnant eyes of his there still lurked a small dissatisfaction. He became impatient at thought of imperfections in his missive and jabbed his pen into the ink-stand as though to harpoon the muse therein, — at which the just resentment of the muse became evident; for the pen of Blurdge was broken, the ink enveiled his hand, and his brow grew black as the newly offended member.

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He swore, and perhaps the devil (if we allow for one minute his Majesty's fallibility) mistook this for a second prayer. At all events, after the inky darkness there came a flood of light (as dawn gives chase to night), and the expression of Blurdge showed pleasure.

"That," said he to himself, speaking of the second attempt, "is too devilishly complicated. Of course there's underlying motive enough. What Fabian would imagine he saw would be my truckling desire to please the marquis and aid in upholding the nobility. He dislikes me heartily; he would be glad to prove my error and Montrecourt's rascality. But I don't like the complexity of it.

"I wish I knew more. Confound the valet for getting so stupidly drunk that day! It was too much of a good thing; well, it's experience. I've told Fabian all I actually know. Of course I have a theory; 'creditor,' 'heiresses,' and the other drunken maunderings create surmise, but that's all. Devil take the valet!

"The letter must be simpler, or Fabian'll

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smell a rat, — simpler and less eager, like this, for instance : —

“DEAR RAY, — I am dropping you a line to ask if you know anything against the Marquis Montrecourt. He seems a nice enough fellow, and is coming up for membership at the Bristol Yacht Club in a few weeks. One or two people talk against him here, but I thought a favourable word for him from you in Paris would lay the ghost of gossip.

“He’s coming here to live soon after his election, and you may hear news soon, for he’s ardently devoted to Miss Minturn.

“Yours faithfully,

“CRAWFORD BLURDGE.

“Better put! On the whole, quite good enough to go!” ejaculated Blurdge, and he began to address an envelope. “It does away with the two defects of the last, — complexity and the obvious fact that we would have been placing an unusual and suspicious amount of faith in Fabian’s cleverness had we proposed the bluff, and based our decision on its result.

“As it is now, jealousy will reign supreme and find a way to damage. I’d trust it every time for that.

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“Thunder! I hope he won’t shoot himself, though. I’m playing with a skyrocket — no doubt of it; still, one has to take chances, if the stakes are only big enough. The point is to know when; and the correct solution of a puzzle is invariably the simplest.”

Now this last remark by Blurdge was the effect of his two failures and final success. With Krauber (had he been the utterer) it would have been the *cause* of the last letter, and being already in the main structure of his life’s policy, it would have saved the time wasted on the first two endeavours.

That’s the difference between a young adept and an old adept, — the one puts his truths on top of his attainments for a roof; the other puts them underneath for a foundation. They are both good, but one is better.

Yet we must be lenient with poor Blurdge — so young. Surely he will become more and more expert, until even Krauber may find a rival. Let us hope for the best.

## CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH MRS. FLUB JUMPS AT A CON-  
CLUSION AND THICKENS THE PLOT

**I**N the meantime Sappho Flub, having partially recovered from the shock to her nervous system and the terrible crescendo on her heart-strings, returned to her home. Immediately upon arriving there, she went to the gorgeous desk and notepaper in her "bow-doir," — the Flub, not French, for dressing-room. She had made one error, the possible result of which must by all means be averted. She had announced her engagement to Blurdge prior to its becoming inevitable. It had been done in a moment of the revengeful spirit's domination. She must keep the channels of repetition closed.

So she wrote to Montrecourt requesting that he should maintain strict secrecy regarding her announcement and ask those who had been his guests to do likewise. She knew he would grant her wish to the



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letter, and around her convalescent temper rested the mantle of confidence, as she rang for the footman, telling him to take her note immediately to the mail-box.

The mantle of confidence, however, was this time misplaced, thanks be to Mrs. Flub on the piazza.

"A note, James?" she asked, none too loudly.

"From Miss Sappho, M'd'm."

"To who?"

"To the post-office, M'd'm."

"Oh, yes; that's the one," at last catching sight of the address, "I was to add a postscript to. Thank you. Come back in five minutes to take it, James."

"Yes, M'd'm."

Then Mrs. Flub, her heart pitty-patting with excitement, her eyes popping out with curiosity, hurried into the library and locked the door.

But there was none to molest her, Mr. Flub being away on business, and Sappho being engaged in donning her diamonds for dinner.

Mrs. Flub showed either a surprising inventive power, or an equally operative,

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though scarcely so commendable, ability born from experience. For in two minutes, by rolling a pencil under the flap, the precious envelope lay open and unmarred.

She hardly dared to read the letter. She felt sure it contained evidence of an all-important character. Sappho had shown traces of excitement on arriving from Bristol. Is it too trite to remark that with all of us that great giant, Desire-to-Know, is hard to resist, but with the Mrs. Flubs he is irresistible?

Finally, at the end of three minutes, she read the message here boldly published.

It began without any beginning, or rather salutation, which of course was on account of the writer's dignified wrath, but which Mrs. Flub interpreted as a sign of unmistakable endearment.

This was the beginning:—

Please do not speak of the engagement yet, and ask your guests of that day not to do so. I forgot to ask you before leaving.

I have not yet told my father and mother, for I love to keep *nice* little surprises like this to serve late in the day, like dessert at dinner. They are *so* pleasant.

S. F.

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And of course Mrs. Flub misinterpreted these underlined bitterest ironies into genuine, earnest words of love.

So Sappho really was engaged to the marquis, after all. Heaven and all the nobility be praised—the almighty dollar be praised—everything on earth be praised—it was glorious! And she—yes, she had done it! Oh, how the papers would soon ring with it; how all America and France would resound with the great tidings! And Newport—poor little Newport—how it would bow down at the shrine of the “Marqueese Sappho Flub Montrecourt”! She wondered if that was what Sappho would be called. These are a few of the host of happy thoughts that multiplied under the wreaths of smiles in those few minutes.

For who will dare picture *all* the emotional sweetness in that moment of achievement when realisation has come?

Scarcely had realisation come than the footman came too. “One minute, James,” said Mrs. Flub, and, with a great attempt (and failure) to look as though nothing extraordinary had happened, she remucilaged

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the dishonoured envelope. "One minute." Then, in an aside to herself, "I really can't help telling him," she wrote on a telegraph blank: —

EPHRAIM FLUB,  
President Great Western Railway Co.,  
CHICAGO, ILL.

We have got what we wanted. Don't mention to her. Found out by accident. Announcement later. "W. W."

Which stood for "wee wifie," the pet name the sentimental Mrs. Flub always used when speaking of herself to her husband, — although he called her "Ma," and found it shorter.

The telegram she carefully put into a sealed envelope, that James might not read it.

But Jameses usually despise and totally disregard seals, especially when the seals are on wholly unnecessary envelopes. This James was no exception to the rule.

Thereupon there were conundrums in the kitchen for many days after. How thoughtless of Mrs. Flub! But then you know the very joyful do persist in being unwary.

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And it did n't matter much, anyway.

That which resulted from the receipt of the dispatch is of far greater importance ; hence we follow it with almost the rapidity of its own transmission to Chicago. In that city were the main offices of the Great Western Railway, at which a meeting of the stockholders was now being held to elect officers.

Presiding in the chair, one of those great leather chairs of ease whereon only finance magnates are enthroned, sat the King of them all, the gigantic money-mushroom, sprung up in the night of a panic, the huge boulder of western gold-quartz, — *Flub*. There he sat, and, as the editor of *The Labour Leader* had once in a splurge of applauded demagoguery more or less truthfully proclaimed, he seemed “a big, blatant, coarse caricature, a rough, tough chouser of workers and widows, a monumental money-maker, a damner of the public, who washed his gold in the life-blood of men.” There, there he contentedly sat, “the lord fisherman of finance,” further to quote *The Labour Leader*, “he whose country is his seining-ground, whose

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stock is the water-soaked bait to be bitten, this great Neptune of the insatiate ocean sought by the rivers of dollars, — *Flub!* The great American Dives among his Lazareens, Mammon incarnate, — *Flub!*”

And he seemed happy.

But not so happy through all the meeting's opening as at that moment of pleasure when a diminutive boy came to the throne with the salaams and the message from Newport. He sent no answer to it, for the business of the meeting demanded the entire attention of its chairman. He leant over to one side, however, and whispered several words in the ear of a lieutenant, who straightway might have been seen to confer hastily in an undertone with two or three others. It is unnecessary to record the names of these henchmen; suffice it to say that with Mr. Flub's their holdings formed a good comfortable majority of the capital stock. And it was not long after their visit from the lieutenant that one of them arose with an unexpected nomination.

And I question even the legality of it, being done at so late an hour, yet who

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with less than a million for salary knows the corporate law of Illinois, or any other State, for that matter, except that of Maine, New Jersey, and the Virginias, which is lax; therefore incorporating in them is become as common as failing, and devil take the creditors.

"I nominate," said the henchman, "for the office of Assistant Secretary of this company, Mr. D'Aubigné Montrecourt of Newport, Rhode Island, a gentleman whose strict integrity, whose knowledge of foreign railroads, whose unquestioned ability, seem to have fitted him better than all other candidates for the position. And I feel sure I have the sanction of the President, who knows Mr. Montrecourt intimately, in making this nomination."

Whereupon the President was seen to incline his head so far as the shortness of his neck would allow, while an expression of unmistakable recommendation crossed his face.

Therefore the worthy lieutenant and gallant henchman, flanked by other faithful supporters, carried the election in a twinkling, before the "workers and

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widows," if any were present, could say "Jack Robinson,"—much less D'Aubigné Montrecourt.

Thus the marquis had a little surprise in store for him, and Mr. Flub thought the pleasure of it would be increased by maintaining a kind of patronising, imperious secrecy as to its cause. Montrecourt was so well known in Newport, and so popular, and so lassoed for with purse-strings that any one of a half-dozen millionaire friends might have done it. Why, bless you, three were stockholders in this very company! And there comes in Fate's proverbial irony again,—for two of them had given their proxies over to Flub's control, thereby dealing him trumps, as it were, and the right bower into the bargain. The third, a certain Mr. Dangle, whose social life hung by a thread, was none other than he who had obediently nominated Montrecourt. He had no daughter to marry off, no wife with aspirations to please, for Mr. Dangle was a bachelor. Yet he had before him a task harder than either of them. He was trying to get back!

Now, if there is aught of gossip in us



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(and who in the world is without a trace of it?) we are wondering why Mr. Dangle was placed in this unenviable position. How had he fallen?

It was on account of a crime, a frequent yet terrible crime, than which Society knows none worse. Not all the money he had spent blotted out his sin, which is saying a good deal, and Mr. Dangle's sin — to put this horrid, unforgivable, too utterly awful thing into plain English — was the recent loss of his fortune.

Ah, poor little Dangle! I wonder how many there are who, like you, have for their only brilliancy that big iridescent bubble rolling on, bowling men down, bowling them down to your service one after another, quicker than cannon-balls can do it, growing larger and goldener, more powerful, more beautiful, yellow almost as the sun, until — until, and God alone knows why, it is gone — and where is the Mecca of bubbles?

And, Dangle, here is a queer phase to it all, which is the last. Let us look in the path of the real cannon-ball. Its men are dead men, or men wounded, captives

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beyond all chance of loss on earth ; but, Dangle, in the path of your bubble now that it is burst, I see they are rising and laughing at you as though you were only a child with a toy gun, Dangle, and rubber balls to shoot.

There is none to do your bidding. And you ask if there is any further use of your living. That there is, Mr. Dangle, indeed, for you have something to do with the hero in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH THERE IS A LOUD ACCOMPANIMENT OF SECOND FIDDLES

THE Marquis Montrecourt sat alone in his room at Newport. It is doubtful if ever before in his life he had so seriously, so sincerely, contemplated his own condition and position in life, both as they were in the present and might be in the future. No; he would not allow himself even to say "might be." For with the furrows of his forehead and near his mouth and the traces of grey in his hair, with these there had come a decision. Certain I am that few will be able to understand fully the position in which Montrecourt found himself. For this position came as near to being wholly new as any subsolar state or thing. However, I believe that all would have understood that spirit which prompted or rather commanded him to

maintain his contract with Krauber, had they found themselves surrounded by Montrecourt's circumstances, and although they might not have followed him in action they would have done so in feeling. Upon his honour as a gentleman, — with his eyes wide open, — resolutely, with as free a will as ever a man exerted, he had made his agreement. It was clad with the steel of his word ; it could not be broken.

He knew well that even though Sappho Flub had been withdrawn from the market, to speak commercially, there were several other women, any of whom, being fully as rich as his contract demanded, he was in the name of honesty bound to marry. There could be no doubt of their willingness: he was not blind to their advances and the wishes of their parents. It was not so tremendous an onslaught as the attack of the Flubs had been, yet it was unmistakable. The mere thought of these women brought him immeasurable loathing: he would infinitely have preferred death to a day as the husband of any one of them. But death would have been dishonest; for a suicide with debts is a thou-

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sand times more to be condemned than one without them.

The undertaking with which he had left Paris had assumed a more odious form than his imagination had had the power to conceive. He had undergone mental, spiritual, and physical damnation. And, as we have seen, it was not alone the evil which brought him pain, the mire of dishonour and debt, but also the bright star that shone above it, illuminating all its horrors and causing him to know the wrong. In fact, so terrible, so dark, so hopeless, seemed his life, under the radiance of Oléa's goodness, that he closed his eyes with a mighty effort to obliterate the one great picture of a woman fire-graven upon his mind and his heart and his soul. And though the effort to obliterate was unsuccessful, and the possibility was gone for all eternity, he succeeded in drawing the curtain and arriving at a superficial forgetfulness.

Then he became as a judge who sums up clearly in favour of the plaintiff, as a man who fights a final one-sided battle with himself. The time has come when

he alone shall remain the victor, and the conclusion is foregone.

Outwardly he was calm and nonchalant. He called Pierre and ordered a pony of brandy. He leaned back in his chair, gazing into the little glass brilliant with the light of his lamp through it. That which had been uppermost in his mind of late had been the bitter — desperately bitter — realisation from which there was no escape, that all summer he had been supported by Krauber; that Krauber had actually, and was still, paying for his clothes and his man, — yes; was paying even for that pony of brandy! And this thought — so often do trifles bring home big truths — was the worst of all. Yet his expression showed only a slight displeasure like that which follows the taking of some distasteful drug. “The deuce!” and he put down the brandy on the table with never another sip. “The devil!”

At this moment Pierre entered with the decanter of brandy. “Did Monsieur call?” he asked, daring to be facetious.

“Yes, Pierre; the devil,” answered the marquis, with an unprecedented leniency

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towards his valet's wit. "I called the devil, but you will do." Whereat Pierre assumed grimaces offended and amused. But Montrecourt had felt far more truth in the words than jesting. Certainly the infernal one himself could not have been more tormenting than Pierre standing there with the brandy bottle, each of them like an ineradicable entry against him by Krauber in the ledger of Hades.

"Pierre!"

"Oui, M'sieur."

"Did I not own," asked the marquis, quietly, in French, "some old clothes which I brought from Paris? Where are they?"

Pierre looked surprised. "There's only one suit left, M'sieur," said he, "and M'sieur was so kind as to give that to me."

"Where is it?"

"In my trunk, M'sieur."

"You have plenty of others, Pierre?"

"Oui, M'sieur."

"Then leave this one. I shall need it again."

Pierre stood immovable with amaze-

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ment. He had never before in all his service seen the faintest sign of insanity in his master.

"And, Pierre," continued the latter, "I regret to say that I find it necessary to give you notice; you will leave me when your time is up. I shall give you your letters and money for the passage back to France. Please bring me writing materials."

Like one stunned, Pierre left the room. He pinched himself, he laughed, he cried — what a funny dream it was! Then he came back with the pens and paper to find it was n't a dream at all. Then he went out and finished the bottle of brandy, having none of the compunctions of his master, but a desire to drown the emotional sorrow of a French servant after the usual manner of an English one.

In the meantime Montrecourt wrote to his landlord, terminating his lease of the Newport apartment at the end of the current month for which he had already paid. After this he composed a note, of which, curiously enough, he made a copy. And each of these two missives differed from the other only by containing a different





Miss Ancienne, a rich American of French peasant lineage on one side and none at all on the other. She was ten years his senior and looked it. "If there is a seventh Heaven, surely there is a seventh Hell," he observed, "and this is it. Ah, well! not quite so undesirable as Miss Crow, but of the same species and prehistoric period, I should say. Still I'm not much of an antiquarian; I *may* be mistaken; there *may* be several epochs between them." And so he smiled on grimly for a minute or two, which seems to be the way of condemned men, — except they be cowards, — whether they be coming to the gallows actual or the gallows spiritual, which is worse. For before Fate we men are as small boys at school set upon by the bully, sorely tried and tortured and beaten, yet ready to choke to death of our silent sobs rather than cry out.

And the foundation of this readiness is the cornerstone of bravery.

Montrecourt, with an air of *ennui*, yawning, rang for Pierre again. "Please send this telegram, and bring the answer to the Casino. I shall dine there." Pierre bowed,

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took the dispatch, and went out. He was still as one in a dream ; he was dazed half by his discharge and half by the drink he had taken to drown the thought of it.

“ If by any chance,” mused the marquis, “ there should come a ‘ no ’ to that, I shall send this note ; and if this fails I shall send the other.” Then putting the notes into his pocket, his two last rounds of ammunition for self-destruction, Montrecourt left his rooms.

And while sitting alone at his dinner, he thought how very disloyal he had been to his future wife to talk of a seventh Hell and prehistoric epochs. Which goes to show that the honour of a man is altogether a fearful and wonderful thing.

It was not long before he felt that he knew beyond all doubt the name of his future wife. For Pierre brought him the answer, which was no respite, but solely and simply the most eloquent of all words, “ Yes.”

Soon after this Montrecourt left the Casino, and, turning away from Bellevue Avenue, whom should he meet but Dangle, wreathed in smiles !

"Ah, Monsieur, I was just coming to your apartments to bring you a letter on business;" and Dangle drew an envelope from his pocket.

Montrecourt, showing but slight surprise, and inwardly predicting the presence of some promoting scheme, turned towards his rooms. "My thanks to you, Mr. Dangle. Come back to the rooms with me, won't you?"

Which was exactly what Dangle desired. Nevertheless, "Oh, no, my dear marquis," said he, "you were bound elsewhere."

"Merely to idle away an hour before calling," returned Montrecourt. And by this time the two were at the house. The Frenchman threw open his door with the most cordial air in the world. Then they went in. Montrecourt had hoped to spend "the last hour of his life," as he called it, with as few reminders as possible of his fast-approaching doom. Yet who could have been a more certain reminder than Dangle? For this fellow, Dangle, was an ardent aspirant for the fortune (and incidentally the hand) of Miss Ancienne, and Montrecourt happened to be the one

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great obstacle in Dangle's path towards success ; because, while a marquis remains in the horizon, where in the world is an untitled nonentity ? Montrecourt had eclipsed the sun of Dangle's wooing as he had previously obscured Blurdge's. Besides, Miss Ancienne could wait ; she knew how ; she was no beginner in the art. Of course if Montrecourt failed her, and this, her last chance in the direction of the nobility were absolutely gone, she would accept the inevitable as cheerfully and resignedly as possible, take Dangle, and congratulate herself with all the philosophy she could muster for the event.

Montrecourt fully understood the situation, and, wishing to give Dangle every opportunity, he had this very day, as we know, left the affair entirely to the decision of chance, by the lottery method already described. Ever since his arrival in Newport and first meeting with her, Montrecourt had noticed that Dangle sought to conciliate him and to place him under obligations, — a policy, which though mute seemed to speak louder than words, saying, " Come, now, my dear sir, I'll do

anything on earth for you, if you'll *only* get out of the way."

Montrecourt was right; all summer this had been the method of Dangle, and now he had come to crown it with the contents of the envelope now in his hand.

"It is the notice," said he, handing Montrecourt the letter with a bow, "of your election as Assistant Secretary of the Great Western Railway, for which office, my dear marquis, I had the honour—the honour and the extreme pleasure of nominating you."

The astonishment of Montrecourt was apparent. How had Flub happened to allow this? How had Flub permitted the showing of patronage to the very man who had so recently withdrawn from the race after his daughter? Besides, Sappho was engaged to Crawford Blurdge; according to the usual order of things he should have been chosen. But perhaps Sappho had not yet announced the engagement to her parents; her note had said that she would do so later. And perhaps (ill-fortune take the thought!), perhaps there had been some terrible mistake, and Flub,

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having misunderstood the condition of affairs, had exerted his power as President in behalf of the marquis. But no, thank Heaven! that was not so, for Dangle had made the nomination.

And the reason for this being so readily explained in the mind of Montrecourt, who instantly thought of the woman in the case, he merely for an instant touched the true solution, on his way to the false, but pleasanter one.

"You have done me a favour, Mr. Dangle," observed the marquis, "which indeed I cannot easily repay."

"Splendid!" thought Dangle; "yes; you can, and what's more! you know how."

"But, tell me," continued Montrecourt, "was Mr. Flub at the meeting?"

Now, Dangle was not going to allow Flub to steal his thunder just at present, — not a bit of it! Later Flub could have his innings, to which there would then be no objection from Dangle, for Flub's innings might mean Sappho, and Sappho meant Montrecourt's farewell to Miss Ancienne. But at this juncture in the game Dangle wished the entire obligation

to come from him. It was a bird in the hand, and he had had unfortunate experience with the other kind.

"Yes," he replied; "Mr. Flub presided, and I thought from his expression that he objected, but surely I was mistaken. I trust I am not rude to have suggested even the possibility of such a thing."

Montrecourt, seeming pleased at this, returned, "And what made you think, Mr. Dangle, if I may ask, that I would accept any position whatever?"

At this Dangle was staggered. He knew Montrecourt would accept; he knew Flub would never have arranged matters thus unless Montrecourt was placed so as to regard a remunerative occupation as desirable. Hence he guessed the truth, and decided that the Frenchman was not nearly as rich as his clothes and manners proclaimed him. Being a promoter, Dangle understood this phase of human life. But he could n't say all that to the marquis, so he answered simply, "I did not think you would accept; it was merely a little compliment, my dear Montrecourt. There! it is done and forgotten."



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One is made to wonder by this speech why Dangle had not "gotten back" before now. It was so far from stupid! Montre-court arose from his chair, with a look in his eyes,—that look of dull, lustreless dread and despair which comes to the eyes of men who for one last minute look back from the threshold of doom,—which was the one and only expression of his suffering. "Well, Mr. Dangle," said he, "I thank you again; and although I shall not be able to accept the position, for, curiously enough! I have just taken another, I fully appreciate your compliment. I have an engagement now,—unfortunately, for I should much more enjoy this evening here with you. I hope you will accept my apologies for leaving? Shall we walk together towards the avenue?" For once in his life Montre-court found his words coming from him by sheer mechanical force. He scarcely knew their tenor. Yet he chatted on pleasantly with Dangle while the two walked leisurely along, and he concealed his feelings to perfection.

It was not long before he realised that

Dangle had come almost to the ferry with him. "You're good company, Mr. Dangle, such excellent company that I had not realised you had come all this distance with me. I'm sure it's out of your way — don't come any farther — really now, please don't, my dear fellow; I'm going only to the ferry."

"And over to Jamestown!" exclaimed Dangle, in a voice of surprise, query, and chagrin.

"Yes; over to Jamestown," returned the marquis, and amid all his own unhappiness he felt sorry that he was on the very point of dooming this poor fellow to disappointment.

"I *was* going there, too," declared Dangle, tremulously, "to Miss Ancienne's;" and had he been a woman he would have wept, would poor disheartened Dangle. Then Montrecourt forgot about all his own troubles for the moment, wondering "how the dickens" he could help Dangle, anyway.

In that minute came an inspiration. Altruists will say it was the reward of his one supreme self-forgetful moment. Scof-

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fers will laugh and say Montrecourts are not About Ben Adhems; meanwhile the author makes not the slightest endeavour to explain, but merely records what happened, which is the duty of all faithful chroniclers.

Montrecourt saw a chance of salvation in which there was at all events relief from the present infliction and for several days to come.

"Mr. Dangle," said he, quietly, "perhaps I shall accept the position of assistant secretary. There are ten minutes in which to catch the boat. If you listen to me and follow my suggestions, you will be glad that you made that nomination." Dangle, looking bewildered, was about to answer. But Montrecourt made a gesture demanding silence. "If you will forgive me, Mr. Dangle," said he, "I think it will be well if I do all the talking. My advice, then, to you is this: take the next boat to Jamestown, call where you intended,—it may be on Miss Ancienne, and it may not for all I know," which of course was more chivalrous than true, "show surprise at nothing, and, above

all, *deny nothing*. Soon your way to a certain goal will be open, and it seems to me, Mr. Dangle, that your ends will already be accomplished. And now good-night—you have two minutes—better run, I should think—I will return to my apartment.”

As though his actions were governed by some superior force, as though he were a clock-work toy just wound, Mr. Dangle, bidding the marquis good-night, took to his heels and ran. There would be time for reasoning later.

And while sauntering up the hill Montrecourt exclaimed: “Lucky that was n’t a note—she would have recognised the handwriting! *Mon Dieu!* I wonder how I—I of all people in the world—had the good fortune to sign ‘D’ instead of ‘M.’ *Hélas!* M’lle Ancienne, how perplexed you will be—it is too bad!”

There is a flush which comes to autumn leaves as well as to roses; there is an afterglow not only in the skies, but also in foliage and in life. And this after-glow, whether it be on the western horizon,

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the October woodland, or on some woman's cheeks, brings to us a quiet, silent sadness of which there is no counterpart elsewhere on earth. But while with leaf and sky this flush betokens those moments which although they are past are nevertheless all of fulfilment and joy, with a woman it is different. The colour in her cheeks is not memory; it may not be even the kiss of Fancy's lover, for the spell of Fancy breaks with age; it may not be even a hope for that future which is all too short; it is the thought of the happiness which came so near yet never fairly crossed—no, nor even touched—the path of the past. Or perhaps it is a ghost of this happiness come back and for an instant standing there in the shadow of the woods, by the downward road the woman is travelling.

Of Sappho Flub we have made fun, for there is an abundance of it in fatness; and of many others, perhaps, but at the threshold of Miss Ancienne's somehow the jester's bauble has no place, his bells are out of tune. I know he tries the

world over to provoke laughter at thought of desirous spinsterhood, but I believe down deep in the heart of him, he sorrows. In an earlier part of this chapter, looking on Miss Ancienne from a distance, we have laughed; but now that we see her sitting there in the half-light of her loneliness, reading Montrecourt's telegram, that strange, still flush on her cheeks which is as the autumn redness, the evening afterglow, sets its own silence on our lips. And even the desire to smile is gone. Thus, time and again, on meeting Humour face to face we are surprised to find him Travesty.

Miss Ancienne read the dispatch twice with all the perplexity the sender had predicted. This was indeed an unusual situation. She had had no expectation of seeing either D'Aubigné Montrecourt or Dangle, for it was well understood that Montrecourt's next visit would mean a proposal, or rather, acceptance, for if the truth must be told, *she* had as good as done the proposing. Montrecourt's next visit would mean a proposal, while a call from Dangle would mean presumption

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pure and simple, — presumption and unwarranted persistence, — for she had clearly and distinctly told him not to come until she sent for him, which would mean when she was ready to see him — and marry — and be done with him.

From all this it will not be hard to appreciate Miss Ancienne's quandary ; had Montrecourt relented or was Dangle presumptuous ?

At first she did not know to whom to send her answer. But, as we have seen, it went to Montrecourt, — that non-committal "Yes" which might so easily be explained if she found that, after all, "D" stood for Dangle. And this, as we have observed, was soon to be indisputable. For at nine o'clock Dangle's card was sent up, and she came down to receive him. To give Miss Ancienne her due, never before in some ten or fifteen years had she looked so well ; for, mark you, she was not dressed and made up for Dangle, but for the marquis.

Her disappointment, however, at seeing the second fiddle instead of the first was not so keen as might have been

expected; for poor Miss Ancienne had lost that sanguinity which is a crown jewel of youth.

At first she roundly berated Dangle for having come before he was bidden, but now there came a second message, which changed her manner towards him. It was brought over in a box of glorious roses by Pierre, on Montrecourt's launch from Newport, and said :—

MY DEAR MISS ANCIENNE, — Unforeseen circumstances have prevented my coming to bid you a final good-bye. I say final, for I expect soon to be far away from Newport. The truth is, Miss Ancienne, I am engaged, and I know you will be among the first to congratulate me. More than this I cannot possibly say now. Even names are not to be mentioned.

Yours, with a summer behind me which I shall not forget,

MONTRECOURT.

“All of which is true,” the marquis had said; “I am engaged by the Great Western Railway, and God only knows I shall never forget this summer!”

Later in the evening, when he went to the post-office to mail another letter, — for



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this one he would not trust to Pierre, — he met Dangle.

“Ah! back again!” said the marquis, pleasantly.

“Yes; with good news,” returned Dangle.

“Of what, may I ask?”

“News of my engagement.”

“To whom?” and the question was more kind than inquiring.

“To Miss Ancienne.”

“Ah, my dear fellow, a thousand congratulations!”

“*Merci bien!* that’s the way you say it, *n’est-ce pas*, Monsieur? but look here, Montrecourt, why was I expected, and why did affairs change so suddenly, and how on earth —?”

“Silence on all these little points,” interrupted the marquis, starting to leave, “is the price I must demand for the fav — I mean is the compliment I shall be glad to receive in addition to the many I have already had at your hands. *Nom de Dieu!* I can never repay you!”

Was there ever a politer man on earth than a polite Frenchman?

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After that, Dangle and Montrecourt parted, and this is the last exit of Dangle, who played second fiddle to Montrecourt, and of Miss Ancienne, who played second fiddle to Sappho Flub. But we shall see them again outside the book, any day, the world over, — Dangle for ever trying to "get back," Miss Ancienne with that flush which is the afterglow, having a small warmth of colour in it, yet enough to melt the laughter from our eyes.

The biggest orchestra in the world is the motley throng of those who play out of tune for those who dance out of time. And until the final dispersement we shall find Dangle and Ancienne hopelessly, obediently, unceasingly scraping their little accompaniment among the second fiddles.

The letter which Montrecourt posted that night was addressed to Krauber in Paris. Part of its contents ran thus:—

. . . and having decided to negotiate no longer in the matrimonial direction, provided of course that you are willing to release me from my contract, I will pay you such reasonable interest on your loan as we may hereafter agree upon. I am able to make you this offer,

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for I find that I can obtain a position which will yield enough to deduct this interest from my income and still have a remainder to live on with careful management.

Trusting that this plan will meet with your favour, as it has with mine,

Yours very truly,

MONTRECOURT.

Krauber, however, did not receive this suggestion until many weeks after its mailing; for he had left Paris on "a little pleasure trip," as he informed inquirers, — a little trip across the ocean.

Unfortunately, up to the present time noblemen are not listed securities on the exchange, nor are there regular quotations to show the fluctuations in titles.

So Krauber had deemed it advisable to visit America.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SHOWING WHAT PASSED ON THE ROCKS BY THE CLIFF AT NEWPORT

THE condition of many men's minds, like the American climate, is subject to sudden changes. After his letter to Krauber, Montrecourt found his thoughts and mood undergoing an unexpected reaction from despair to hopefulness. His suggestion to the German seemed so reasonable ; for what more can even the veriest money-grubber want than a large interest on his money ? Surely Krauber would accept these terms, and not be Shylock enough to demand the pound of flesh ! And the marquis having several weeks in which to decide regarding the position, his predecessor being still in office, there would be ample time in which to receive the reply from Krauber, making acceptance possible.

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Then he would begin the erasure of all those blots on the page of his life's book. For we are as urchin school-boys, who begrime our books while studying our lessons, whereupon, being thrashed, we begin the rubbing-out process; and when at last the books are finished many of us will have smooched them, a few will have completed our erasures, but fewer still — ay, all too few of us — will have done the learning.

But even the first start to erase brings with it happiness. And the first sight of freedom brings instantly either strength, self-assertion, and courage, or weakness and fear of responsibility, like that of the Southern slaves, who being suddenly set free knew not where to turn. With Montre-court, however, came the happiness of erasure and self-assertion of new-found independence. He decided that in his last letter to Krauber he had made a mistake. Why should he have allowed the German to consider the question at all? An offer of good interest on the loans was far more than he had ever made before; moreover, it was a just and honest settlement. Then, as still further he reasoned

the matter under the standard of his honour and his honesty, he determined positively that, the honour demanding this policy and the honesty fully sanctioning it, he would agree to no other course than the one mentioned in his letter. Therefore he sent a second and final message, in which he said : —

MY DEAR HERR KRAUBER, — On further considering the matter, I have decided that the offer contained in my last letter to pay you interest at a reasonable rate on all your loans is so just, so equable, and so fully conforms with my ideas of what is an honest settlement under the rather extraordinary circumstances, that I am willing to follow only the course which I have outlined; and if you will not accept these terms, I shall be forced to terminate our contract. Nevertheless, I shall insist on sending you quarterly remittances of interest, of which I trust and feel sure, my dear Herr Krauber, you will not refuse to be the recipient.

Yours very truly,

MONTRECOURT.

After which the marquis immediately wrote, accepting the position of Assistant Secretary of the Great Western Railway.

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And this was the emancipation of Montrecourt.

With all his former nonchalance, his apparent *sang-froid*, throughout his troubles, the marquis had not for many years shown the same buoyant step, the same holding of his head erect, the same smile unmistakably true, that he showed to-day as he walked on Bellevue Avenue. The season was almost over: only a few late stragglers among the summer residents still remained: the avenue, in mid-summer so well filled with carriages of fashion, was now almost deserted. And to Montrecourt it might better have been wholly so, for his thoughts being so engrossed in other scenes he came dangerously near to cutting his friends among the passers-by. He was thinking of Oléa; he was thinking that now he had a right to draw aside the curtain, to look for the first time full into the eyes of that fair face, and, drinking thirstily of their wondrous goodness, to pledge in that deep draught his immortal love.

Thinking after this manner, Montrecourt passed the Casino and would have strolled

on, there is no telling how far, when presently, as though there were in him the power to materialise his visions, he saw the actual Oléa coming towards him, more vivid, more real, more glorious in her beauty than he had ever seen or pictured her. The bright colour of her cheeks heightened on seeing him ; and this, crowned and surrounded by the pure rich gold of her hair, caused her to seem as the sovereign spirit of radiance, queen in the court of the sunlit heavens by whom their colours are conferred.

"Do you know, I was just thinking of you," observed Montrecourt, facing about and walking with her. "Would that more of such dreams came true!"

"What sort of dreams?" she asked, as though she had n't the faintest chance of guessing.

"Dreams of Heaven," he answered quickly, "dreams so wonderful that — but, tell me, have you had luncheon? It's a safer subject than dreams."

Oléa laughed. "Yes," she returned; "with my aunt. We came for the day to do shopping. Could anything be more



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wearisome? My aunt has just gone to call on a friend, and I am gathering up our purchases — as you can see;” and she pointed to several parcels he was carrying for her.

“But, Miss Minturn, I did n’t know you had an aunt in Bristol. I thought you lived with your grandmother.” Being ever under the government of conscience, Oléa felt bound to keep Adele’s secret until she received permission to undeceive. Only to-day she had meant to see Adele and ask for this permission. But hurrying to catch the Newport train had driven the intention from her mind. And so, although she felt certain that Adele would offer no objection, she answered: —

“Oh, yes, I have an aunt in Bristol. It’s queer that you’ve never met her, is n’t it?” And Oléa thought it was very queer indeed; she wished he had met the aunt, and, what’s more, at Fabian Park, for then probably the proverbial cat in the bag would have effected its escape, and she would have been all the happier. Nine bagged cats out of ten are a source of continual annoyance.

"On what train do you return?" inquired the marquis.

"It goes at five."

Montrecourt consulted his watch. "Two hours," he ejaculated. "Which leaves you one hour to do as you please at the very least. Ah, if I only had the ordering of your movements for that hour, I should be very happy."

"Tell me the orders."

The marquis mused. "I would say, 'Come with me, and we will walk down to the rocks under the cliff. And from there together we will look off over the sea, and map out the course of our crafts. Then we may talk of the dreams again, and perhaps finding them more dangerous even than our sea in the worst of its moods, we will return to your aunt and the train.'"

"I was always an obedient child," returned Oléa, smiling. "You have but to command, and for an hour I will follow."

"Showing implicit trust?" asked Montrecourt.

"Showing implicit trust in you for ever,"

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she returned simply, "and obedience for an hour," she quickly added, laughing.

"Trusting in me," thought Montrecourt, "in me," he repeated several times, and each repetition seemed painful as the stab of a knife to him.

"I await your commands," declared Oléa, "and beg leave to give one of my own: don't bother to bring the bundles; we can leave them in the shop here," pointing to a dressmaker's near by, "and stop for them later." The marquis obeyed his orders. "There is only one thing worse than carrying bundles," observed Oléa, meditatively.

"No," exclaimed Montrecourt, incredulously; "what's that?"

"Dropping them," she returned.

"And there's only one thing better than commanding you," pursued the marquis, "and that is being commanded by you. So I resign the command in favour of Miss Minturn for the hour — and always if it is her wish."

"No; the hour is enough," said Oléa, contentedly, "for to-day."

"To the beach, then," said the new commander.

But as they walked towards the shore, the flippancy left them, giving place to the silence of earnestness. Over a rock smoothed by the tides of centuries he spread his coat for her. Here he stood for some minutes close to her. Now imagine the brilliant marquis wanting in words! Imagine, if you can, Montrecourt, who had never been known to fail in wit or compliment or eloquence, imagine him almost blunt for once in his life! Never before had he seemed so humble, self-depreciative, and single-minded. Never before had he come so near to being really awkward, but he was not so, for even now his wonderful grace and quiet of manner stood the test, and his ease remained perfect. Only the facility of his language forsook him. He was battling, as he had never dreamed of battling, for the mastery of his feelings; and the contention, although resulting in unquestionable victory for himself, left him with so great a new awe of the mighty undercurrent in his own depths that he dared scarcely to speak or to move.

“Adele, I love you.”

She made no answer for many minutes;

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but when at last it came, her voice was gentle as the breath of the breeze — and wistful.

“No,” she said. “No; we are neither awake nor real.”

“Dear, you are wrong,” he answered; “but I am dumb to-day.”

“Yes,” she returned; “I think words are for everything but this — and yet —”

“I love you,” he broke in quietly.

She looked off towards a shadowy ship on the far horizon, as though by defining its outline she might also succeed in dispelling her own vagueness. “Make me realise it!”

“No,” he answered firmly; “I have told you once; nothing on earth could have prevented that, but it is enough. Besides, why should you want realisation? If you do not love me it will bring no pleasure, for you are far, far above the desire for conquest. And if — oh, God, Adele, if you do love me — I ask you —” and his voice grew pleading — “I ask you in the name of that very love not to tell me so; it would bring you pain.”

“No,” she said, “you are wrong; but I

could not," she went on, as if half to herself, "for I do not know. I know only that I wish — no; I insist — remember; you have resigned your command to me — you are pledged to obey — ah, do obey me — make me realise that you love me."

Montrecourt looked down deep into her eyes. "I can say no more," he whispered; "the years, or perhaps even the days to come will bring you the knowledge, for truth cannot stay long from its own spirit."

The colour in Oléa's cheeks grew deeper, more crimson. "Dear," said she, looking from his eyes to the stones at her feet, "why — why if I were to find that I — cared for you, would you not let me tell you?"

"Because," he answered sadly, "I would have no right to ask you to be my wife."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Because —" and then Montrecourt hesitated; was there any reason beside his poverty? For the last time he asked himself if he was absolutely certain that he was free. He would not allow the smallest chance or misconception of his own to

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exist whereby inadvertently he might deceive her. And, surveying all the conditions so closely and conscientiously, he could not help coming back to his previous decision that he was free, — free to ask her to marry him, — save for his poverty. Yet this one obstacle, although it brought none of the bitter suffering and debasement which would have come from the contract, had that menace still been valid, seemed fully as insurmountable and prohibitive. Had he been able to count on the whole of his promised salary, instead of only that small part remaining after the payment of the annual interest to Krauber, he would have found himself in a position to support a wife. By nature he was not the sort of man to consult with a woman regarding his purse, nor with his purse regarding a woman. If men made a more common practice of doing both, there would be fewer spendthrifts and fewer divorces. But observation had taught Montrecourt that while a man may be contented on a pittance if he is married, a woman cannot unless she is single, — which is rather hard on all couples who are in love and in

poverty at one and the same time. Theoretically, of course, the marquis believed that perfect love demanded marriage, regardless of circumstances and of all external conditions of life. He knew of only one woman in the world having the capacity for a love like this; but as he looked down at her now, sitting there very near to him, he felt that he had not the courage to hope. Moreover, even if she loved him, the theory was not for her. It would have brought her more sorrow in the end than joy, and himself a tenfold greater sorrow in seeing hers.

"Adele," he said,—and every time he called her by that name there came a regret to her that she had not asked permission of the real Adele to undeceive him,— "I am a poor man."

Then, although perhaps Oléa did not fully appreciate it, there came a feeling of infinite relief.

"But surely," she returned, "you will have a good salary from the railway." And he wondered why she had shown no surprise upon hearing of his poverty. The truth was, and had he known her better he



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would have understood it, that money, or the lack of it, was a subject of little or no interest to her, except for the sake of others, mostly because she was of too spiritual a nature, yet partly, to maintain the accuracy of our analysis, because she had never felt the need of it. She knew, too, that appearances are for ever deceitful in these matters.

“I shall have a fairly good salary,” said Montrecourt, “but more than half of it must be used for an indefinitely long time to pay the interest on my debts,—debts to a wretched German in Paris by the name of Krauber. *Dieu!* how I wish that I had never met him!” At the mention of debt Oléa felt sympathy and regret. She had a horror of it, both innate and caused by certain experiences of her spendthrift brother, when on more than one occasion she had come to his rescue.

“I am sorry,” she said; but then the regret quickly vanished, for, after all, the interest was to be paid and Montrecourt was under no obligation, so she told herself with pleasure.

“But,” she continued in a voice scarcely

audible, "tell me, has the hour of your pledged obedience passed?"

"No," he answered; "you have five minutes left in which to command."

"Then I command you," she said slowly, "to tell me what I am saying to you." She looked up, and her words were all in her eyes.

"I plead for leniency," he remonstrated.

"I command," she repeated imperiously.

"Adele, you are saying that you love me."

Then for a few minutes they were silent.

"It is the beginning," she answered presently.

"Thanks be to God in Heaven," he whispered, "and may He bring as happy an ending!"

"There will be no ending," said Oléa.

"I meant on earth," he returned; and for several minutes their silence remained unbroken.

"Adele, remember, we cannot marry. I am a poor man," he repeated.

"The next time I see you in Bristol," she rejoined, "I shall have something to

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tell you: it will surprise you; it may for a time make you unhappy; but it will in the end show you that your money matters need in no way be considered, and that there is not the slightest reason in the world why we should not — but, dear, how late it is! You've allowed me only half an hour to stop for my aunt and the bundles and to catch the train."

"Should not what?" he said, without moving; and the persistence of his manner fascinated her more perhaps than all else on his surface.

"Be married."

"Then you will tell me of a miracle," he declared.

"You shall see in Bristol. When can you come?"

"May I come with you now, to-night?"

"No; I shall have to call on some one this evening," she answered, "and ask permission to tell you the something —"

"To-morrow, then, dear one?"

"Yes; to-morrow."

So this was exactly the way of it all, — the way both of their stories were told,

## At Newport 247

with no more nor less of words or actions. A thousand times afterwards he recalled it,—by day, by night,—but that is neither here nor there, for it is in the future.

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN WHICH A GUEST AND HIS HOST CHANGE PLACES

ON his way home after saying good-bye to Oléa and her aunt at the train, every minute of it all came back to Montrecourt, and with the growth of his realisation his happiness increased. But what he saw at his apartments filled him with surprise and a momentary dismay. For there, in the easiest chair in the room and the blandest manner in the world, with a trunk on one side of him and a bag, steamer-rug, bundle, and all the paraphernalia of a traveller on the other, sat Krauber, President of the Matrimonial Syndicate L't'd, smiling and blinking a welcome.

Montrecourt instantly returned the smile, showing an equanimity so perfect as to make the German's seem an unmistakable counterfeit.

"Oh, my dear Herr Krauber, what an unexpected pleasure!"

"Yes," replied the other, with a small show of consideration; "I came over for a little pleasure trip,—have n't had a holiday worth mentioning in years, you know,—and I thought I would spend a week or two in Newport."

"How very nice!" murmured the marquis. "I sent you an important letter yesterday, and this fortunate visit of yours will do away with the chance of any misunderstanding that might have ensued from correspondence. Letters are so very unsatisfactory!"

"Good news?" asked Krauber, wandering with his hands in a kind of caressing way among the isolated hairs of his head, which meant contentment, and having a look in his eyes which seemed as the gleam of a golden vision.

"I consider it so," answered the marquis, lazily holding a cigarette above the lamp. "And before I forget it," he drawled, "perhaps I'd better disclose the plan to you now, — pleasure afterwards."

It was a hard thing to put up with —

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that drawl—it was so conducive to impatience in the listener. So Montrecourt assumed it, and the German writhed; which pleased the whim of the one and displeased the vim of the other.

“I found it advisable,” continued Montrecourt, leisurely, “to write you a letter formally terminating my agreement with you —”

“*What?*” exclaimed Krauber, in mingled astonishment and incredulity. For once in his life surely his ears had misled him.

“I have determined that it is advisable,” repeated Montrecourt, “to withdraw the goods from the market.”

“Surely I made some mistake,” returned Krauber, calmly, for his temper, now burning a dull red within, had not yet shown its heat on the exterior.

“The Marquis Montrecourt is a gentleman. The word of a gentleman is stronger than all other ties of his life—oh, bah! Montrecourt, I know you are joking—always were, always will. Tell me the point.”

“The point is,” rejoined the marquis,

slowly, "that I have no thought of marrying. A business position, however, which I have accepted, will enable me to pay you a reasonable interest on the many loans you have so kindly granted me. And to this at the end of each year I shall add as large a portion of the principal as possible, which is a more liberal offer than I made you in my letter, and —"

"Montrecourt," broke in Krauber, "are you in earnest? Answer me, for if it is a joke, I'm too devilish stupid to see it, and so can't laugh without knowing. And if — if it is not a joke, *Dieu in Himmel!* I am not so stupid but what I can make you regret it." The mingling of French and German in his exclamations were unmistakable signs of Krauber's wrath. At mention of the joke he had endeavoured to smile blandly, which was playing a very inadequate hose on the furious fire of his wrath: therefore a kind of sizzle resulted, and (to mix the metaphor) he looked and sounded not unlike a red-hot stove when the kettle has boiled over.

The marquis knocked the ashes from



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his cigarette, and blew a smoke ring towards Krauber. "I am *not* joking," were the words that followed it, "not joking, I give you my word; and, I agree with you fully, my dear Herr Krauber, as you have so admirably put it, the word of a gentleman is stronger than all other ties of his life."

For several seconds the German gazed, if innumerable intermittent blinks may be called gazing, at Montrecourt. For half that time he considered the expediency of an attempt at persuasion, or of threats, but he knew his man too well to waste his words so uselessly; hence the second half of the several seconds he spent in feeding, yet governing, the internal flame.

"You will regret it," he said with a self-control not at all Teutonic, whereat he arose from his chair, calling Pierre. "I am sorry to intrude," said he, turning to the marquis; "but I am so tired after my trip that I have invited myself to stay here over night and perhaps longer."

"How very nice!" observed Montrecourt, tossing his cigarette into the grate. "You honour me, I assure you."

"Your hospitality was always cordial," declared the German, "and I appreciate it; but really, my dear fellow, I am paying for this, you know."

"Jove, what a *gaucherie!*" thought Montrecourt; "these Germans have such intolerable manners."

"Which makes it rather uncertain," he said aloud and smiling, "whether you are the guest or I am. But perhaps, after all, your way is the better; you are the host, we will say, for I am just leaving here, my dear Krauber, and I shall feel much more comfortable to go as a guest,—it would be so utterly rude otherwise, of course."

By this time Pierre had arrived on the scene. "I trust," said Montrecourt, "you are not in extreme need of my valet for the next half-hour."

"I take pleasure in placing him at your disposal," returned Krauber, trying to imitate the polite manner of the Frenchman. Montrecourt, observing the possessive attitude, showed far more amusement than surprise.

"Pierre, please pack my trunk and my

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bags," he commanded; "but, remember," he went on, after following the valet from the room, "remember, put in them only those clothes which I brought with me from Paris; the others you will return to Herr Krauber in the morning."

Pierre was now surprised at nothing. The actions of his master of late having been so completely inexplicable, he had given up in despair, accepted the inevitable, and decided to obey unquestioningly.

"And on the tags write 'Bristol,'" said the marquis.

Then he went to bid the German good-night. "My curiosity," observed the latter, training his heaviest gun on the enemy for an unexpected bombardment, "is somewhat piqued, I must confess, for I cannot find your move consistent with your hitherto irreproachable honesty."

"And why not?" asked the marquis. "At the end of five minutes I must leave for my train with apologies and an unchanged opinion. Nevertheless, until then I shall be glad to hear the cause of your surprise at my decision."

Montrecourt was formality itself.

"Look here, my dear marquis," said Krauber, for the first time showing in his manner an endeavour to ameliorate, "you see, I would n't blame you so much if you had failed,—if you had come over, and after working with integrity and industry you had not succeeded in finding a single purchaser. That would have been hard luck and just as big a loss, but it would have been honest, whereas your present intentions make you guilty of downright robbery —"

"For which accusation," broke in Montrecourt, quickly, "you will apologise *immediately*."

"I will not," returned the German, "immediately nor later."

The Frenchman became furious. His eyes shot fire; his cheeks blanched; but his tranquillity remained. "Herr Krauber is the host of the Marquis Montrecourt," he observed quietly; "therefore the hands of the marquis are tied as if the insult were from a woman."

At this Krauber continued sullenly,—and there was craven shame in his face, although the shot had nearly passed over

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his head — “downright robbery; that is, if I understand the situation correctly.”

Montrecourt smiled. “I have an extra five minutes,” said he, “if I hurry to catch the train more than is usual or comfortable: will this give you time, Herr Krauber, for a little description of your misunderstanding?”

“Yes,” rejoined the German, further angered by the other’s calmness. “It will give me time to say that if you marry the woman you’re devoted to, and don’t divide the profits, you’re a blackguard and a thief. My money,” he continued, his fury causing him to disregard Montrecourt’s look of astonishment, “will have enabled you to win her, and then you pocket all the proceeds yourself. It’s thievery, — despicable rascality.”

“Your temper annoys me,” interrupted Montrecourt; “really, my dear Krauber, I am wholly unaccustomed to these outbreaks; besides, it wastes time. I contemplate no marriage whatever; the one woman to whom I proposed has accepted another man, and —”

“I know that, and him,” broke in Krau-

ber; "I'm not speaking of her; I'm talking about the girl you've just left. You spent this afternoon with her, and many another afternoon, so I'm told. I saw you put her on the train, and now you're going after her, — the richest girl in Rhode Island, so they tell me. What's her name? Oléa Fabian — that's it."

Montrecourt looked puzzled. Krauber so rarely made mistakes of this kind. "There is no longer a doubt," observed the former, "of your misconception, but its cause is a mystery." Montrecourt held his watch in his hand, and looking from its face to the less intelligible face of Krauber, then back again, he declared, "I have not seen Miss Fabian more than once or twice this summer; the last time was over a month ago. I regret that you so readily give credence to a palpable misinformation."

It was now the German's turn to show perplexity. "Who was the girl with you at the depot?"

"I have a whim," returned the marquis, with his first approach to brusqueness, "which forbids an answer to that question,

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but finds great pleasure in allowing me to tell you that her income is as far below as Miss Fabian's is above the average."

"The deuce it is!" ejaculated Krauber.

"Yes; but I must hurry. Good-night," returned Montrecourt.

Then he went to the town of Bristol.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE WHITE CROSS

**H**AVING obtained the desired permission from Adele with little difficulty, a feeling of great relief came to Oléa.

A light rain had fallen ; faint clouds were drawn back like shadow curtains from before the moon. A magic light ensilvered the distant waters and the raindrops on the autumn foliage.

As she sat by her broad-silled window, Oléa's mood harmonised with the night. Her heart opened to the evergreens, the elms, and the knotted fruit trees, to the moss-grown boulders and the asters in all their hues, and yet more to the homeless flowers beyond the wall, the waif begging of God only, the vagrant wild and reckless in the meadows, — the only untrained, untrammelled genius among flowers. For, although the rose, the orchid, and many a parlour plant are talented enough in their



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way, and beautiful, Heaven knows the wild wood violet is a truer poet than them all. Certain big chrysanthemums, it is true, having an eccentric manner of wearing their hair, assume well the aspect of genius, but I have no faith in them.

To the lilt of the breeze now idly fanning her Oléa listened with gladness, for this and the soft lapping of the tide on the far-off beach were her sweetest night tunes; the sad cries of passing birds troubled her. But to-night the lonely grave-ground half hidden beyond the fields before her window, the distant bay glistening, the tall pines, black and silver green, and even the sky and the stars, passed soon from her thoughts, for Nature had found a rival. Oléa was thinking all of him, the lover, the master, hers, as she was his, — through all the ages, — and her love was true, unfathomable, omnipotent. And then as though in half apology for the neglect of her first love, Nature, she came back to the scene before her. But see what a poor apology! For in the mysterious pines, ever faithful, sorrowful, vigilant, she saw him guarding her, protecting her through

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life; thus she went on likening it all to him, until finally her thoughts mingling with the night became neither distinct nor separate, and she fell asleep, her head in her arms on the sill, the moon's light touching her.

Her slumber, however, was not so sound as to remain unbroken by the crackling of branches and the rustle of fallen leaves near by. She looked, and instinctively drew back. The moon, now at its full height, shone in and out through the graves and hedges, among which in bold relief stood the whitest stone in the old cemetery, bearing the inscription, "Charles Fabian," together with dates of birth and death and an oft-chosen verse from a hopeful hymn. Towards this she saw a man walking, and quickly she blew out the lamp at her back that she might not be discovered. Coming close to the stone, he leaned forward to read the epitaph, while for an instant the shadow masked him. But in another minute he moved slowly back and looked up at the house, so that she quickly receded into the darkness of her room. Another step, however, brought him full



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into the moonlight, at which she gave a low cry of surprise, for the man was Montrecourt.

Only an instant she hesitated; then, following her impulse, she hurried down and went to him.

He showed a slight surprise. "I have learned the truth," he told her, his voice and his eyes revealing so great a depth of sadness that she would gladly have given over her soul to eternal endeavour to bring him a happiness real and complete and abiding.

"I would have told you myself in the morning," she said, taking his hand in both of her own, but soon he withdrew it gently.

"I know," he answered; "for now I begin to understand the cause of it all. Ah, that was unlucky, — that night in the tavern."

"Because I have been compelled to deceive you," said Oléa.

"Yes; and for other reasons," he returned; "but even now I should not know them had you not chanced a month ago to point to this cross, Oléa, as we passed

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by on the road, and you told me it was your father's grave. Do you remember? To-day just after I left you my suspicions were aroused by Krauber, my dear creditor, who has just arrived from France — ”

“ But why should he know anything about it? ” broke in Oléa.

“ Krauber knows everything, ” rejoined Montrecourt, grimly. “ And my suspicions being aroused, ” he continued, returning to his subject, “ they so troubled me that I decided to look at the name on the cross, for this I knew must be your name, too. I prayed God that it might be Min-turn, but I was disappointed. So this very cross, Oléa, has been the cross of my crucifixion. ”

He bowed his head.

“ I cannot understand, ” she answered with a voice of surprise, yet infinite sympathy, “ why the deception has brought you so much sorrow. ”

“ I will tell you, Oléa. It has not brought me sorrow alone ; at first it gave me happiness, — it gave me the right to love you and to love you as Adele Min-turn, secretly, for I thought you were

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poor, and marriage or even avowal were then impossibilities. But now that your fortune suggests a possibility and although from the highest, least worldly, standpoint under ordinary circumstances I would be selfish to let it stand in our way — ”

“More selfish than any man in the world,” interposed Oléa.

“Soon my lips must be for ever sealed against the words of my love,” he continued. “For reasons you do not know, your fortune fixes an eternal gulf between us, Oléa, great as the gulf between Heaven and Hell.”

“Then my fortune shall be thrown to the four winds,” she answered quickly, and, resting her hands on his shoulders, she looked up and found blended with his sadness the joy her words had brought. But the sorrow was infinitely greater, his eyes having in them that look which one or two women have received from one or two men in the whole world, — the silent expression of a desire, insatiable, which has not even a minute in all eternity of an approach to satisfaction.

“I know you would,” he returned.

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"Thank God! I know it; but even then the gulf would be only half bridged, and the last half is impossible."

They were now walking towards the house from the cross, near which they had been standing; and in Oléa's face there was written vague dread of a coming sorrow and in her eyes the tenderest sympathy in the world. Nevertheless, hers was the lesser sadness, being the vaguer.

"If you love me, you will tell me what you mean," she said.

"And if I tell you your love will be gone," he replied. Yet her answering look was an emphatic contradiction. "It is a chance," he continued thoughtfully, as they came to the low porch and sitting on its steps looked off over the box hedges into the darkness of the farm and of the future. He did not so much as touch her hand with his own. "And perhaps my duty is to take the chance, by telling you the truth, to kill your love and rid you of the unhappiness it would surely bring you."

"No," she returned; "you are wrong. You speak of love as though it were mor-

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tal. My unhappiness will be far greater if you keep the truth from me. Remember, the first, the paramount, the all-pre-dominant thing a woman demands is confidence infallible. Every secret of the heart's remotest corner must be shared."

"It is never done," he responded.

"Yet it is one of the few ideal things," she rejoined, "which lie within the possibility of realisation on earth. If you love me, you will tell me."


"Yes," he answered ; "for you have used the greatest talisman of all, and I cannot refuse. Moreover, Oléa, I should not refuse, for your demand causes me to do that which is only my duty. But it is hard, and when you hear I think you too will feel that the very sun itself has gone from the sky. Yet I hope against hope ; and every morning and evening of my life, dear one, I shall pray God for you. If He is merciful, He will bring you when you hear my story a just and sudden hatred of me, with this and with the coming years to bury the dead roots of feeling in your heart under an everlasting forgetfulness. If He is unmerciful He will allow the tree

to grow and strive for a blossoming, only to find the death it should have had before, or else a life alone for ever, which is worse than death."

"Yes; infinitely — infinitely worse," averred Oléa, half to herself, endeavouring by a look at the stars above to shut out the shadow of her increasing dread. "Ah, dear, tell me the story."

Whereon he told it to her, — told it to her as we know it, and in the telling he was brief, stern, merciless, unsparing. He put himself in no worse light than we have put him — and no better. He talked quickly, quietly, looking straight deep into her eyes so long as she held them up to his, and he prayed for her hatred.

But it did not come. For Oléa by this was turned wellnigh to stone. She grew numb; her heart-strings tightened; her cheeks became white, cold, drawn like Death's. Momentarily beauty had gone; age had come. But even seeing her thus, Montrecourt made no attempt to spare her by vindicating himself. He watched her expressions, his life seeming to hang on them, as criminals watch the face of their





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judge to learn his verdict. But while these men look and long for leniency, Montre-court hoped only for the lack of it. Hatred would bring her less pain, as he had said, and he deserved to be despised. Nevertheless, down deep, beyond the boundary of self-government, who knows but that some faint voice called on Heaven asking that the woman's love might not all go?

He arose from the porch and stood looking down at her, while she remained immovable, her face averted. "It is true," he said, in answer to which her eyes came to his; and he found therein a look of so intense a suffering as to burn itself into his soul, there to be for ever his incommutable punishment. In truth, all men on earth are marked, here or there, more or less, thus or so, and the story of Cain has given us a universal allegory.

"Oléa, I am going," he said. "The end has come sooner than we expected."

Then, as though in a kind of stupor, she bade him good-night. Stunned by the cruel blow of the truth, she had fallen into a lethargy, unreasoning.

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And this lasted for several days after he had gone; then one evening as she undressed mechanically for bed, the thought of her past sleepless nights, of his dishonour, and, above all, the fear that he had gone for ever caused her to throw herself on her knees in tears before the bed — and to pray.

A day or two before this Montrecourt had sent a note to Krauber, saying, "I find that through a misconception on my part I deceived you also. My friend of whom you had heard and with whom you saw me at the depot was Miss Fabian. This retraction of my previous denial is all that honesty demands."

After reading the letter Krauber understood the situation, and for the fourth time since his arrival he sent for Blurdge. So carefully and wisely doth the devil choose his tools!

"Exactly what you said, Mr. Blurdge!" observed the master, approvingly. "He has evidently only just been undeceived."

The apprentice, having read the note, betrayed evident pride at thought of his sagacity. "Then whenever you are ready,"

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said he, "I'll be deuced glad to give you the introduction to Mr. Herbert Mortimer."

"Thank you," responded Krauber; "let us go to-night."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE EDITORIAL ROOMS OF THE PROVIDENCE ENQUIRER

**G**REENFIELD sat before his desk in the *Providence Enquirer* office, idly staring at the blank sheets of "copy-paper" to be filled before midnight, now and then dipping his pen in the ink, leaning forward intently as if to begin work, and then abstractedly looking off over the roofs, down to the dim lights in the streets, back to the bare walls of his little editorial office, and then with evident pleasure at a note lying before him. In the next room, separated from his own by a thin partition, Greyson incessantly ticked with the telegraph — oh, the dismal monotony of it, usually! But to-night Greenfield liked its pattering dots and dashes; each letter in the whole Morse alphabet seemed a note in the song his spirits sang. And thus it was, too, with the typewriter out in the open office

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and the tick of the clock as its hand warningly passed eleven. Never before had the three machines sounded so jovial. All were evidently congratulating him, even that inevitable burden, the impish office boy, who continually rushed in with dispatches, "flimsy," or staff copy, at which moments Greenfield buried himself in proof-sheets as though the intruder's eye discovered him not only absent-minded, but also red-handed. For even Greenfield feared this office boy, this exceptional office boy,—this boy unlike any other in newspaper realms, unique in manner and dress, hardy and pertinacious as a bull-pup (his two redeeming traits), and a constant source of worryment to all with whom he came into close contact (therein also not unlike the aforementioned voracious animal). In truth, so closely this boy represented mischievous canine youth that soon after his first appearance in the *Enquirer* office, Greenfield named him the Pup, an aptly-chosen sobriquet, clinging to its owner with as much tenacity as any ordinary sensible dog would have shown had it laid eyes on him.

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For the Pup was not pleasing to look upon. A more homely, unregenerate, ungainly youngster was never to be met, and he possessed a never-failing faculty of tiring one's nerves by bringing his personality to bear upon them, so to speak. Men with nerves of iron have at certain moments become like tea-drinking grannies under the influence of the Pup. Porters have left the *Enquirer* office never to return after having been beneath the Pup's command. Yet to the Editorial Staff the Pup seemed as essential to the publishing of the *Enquirer* as presses. If his habit of whistling popular songs, interspersed with funeral marches, his maddening mistakes, and his practical jokes with the office cat, for which he harboured a truly dog-like hatred, shattered the nerves of the *Enquirer* Staff, his pluck, his hardihood, and his omnipresence rendered him indispensable.

But this is digression. Again the Pup is at his pranks of old, obtruding himself in place of more important matters even as in those days with Greenfield, who unconsciously liked the boy, especially on this

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particular night, when the clock, the typewriter, and the telegraph instrument no longer tattooed tortures, and the Pup's funeral marches seemed joyful as carols.

As the funeral marches ceased, the Pup having been throttled by the telegraph operator, Mr. Herbert Mortimer, proprietor, publisher, editor-in-chief of the *Enquirer* and trustee of the Fabian estate, prolonged Greenfield's unhappy frame of mind by a brief visit and several sinister remarks. A sinister man was Mr. Herbert Mortimer.

"Mr. Greenfield, in less than an hour we go to press. The editorial page should have been locked up long ago. Where is your leader on the Prohibition meeting? Mr. Greenfield, at present you are writing leaders only as an experiment. It is well to be doubly diligent during experiments rather than doubly negligent. I want Prohibition upheld to the utmost power of your lazy pen. We must have a Prohibition editorial in half an hour, Mr. Greenfield, and a Prohibition State in a week. Mark that. And then," continued Mr. Herbert Mortimer, coming nearer and

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lowering his voice, "we shall see what we shall see." Greenfield thought this quite possible, as with a sinister smile of determination Mr. Mortimer walked away to his sanctum, accompanied by an almost inaudible funeral march from the Pup between throttles.

Greenfield took the opened letter from his desk and after a long, last look, tore it in halves, then in quarters, then in eighths, and threw it into the editorial scrap-basket. Then he grasped his pen as if it were trying to leave him, dipped it so hard into the ink-bottle as to break its point, replaced it with another, plied the other to the paper, rumpled his hair as if to have the opposite effect upon his brains, and wrote a half-column editorial favouring Prohibition, in which he had no belief, with overpowering strength. The clock struck midnight.

"Pup."

"Yessir."

"Send this copy up."

"Right, sir," and the boy started for the door.

"Pup."



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"Yessir."

"Tell them to hurry a proof of it down."

"Right, sir," and again he was starting away.

"Pup."

"Yessir."

"You're a nuisance!"

"Right, sir," and he was gone.

Then Greenfield put his hand down into the editorial scrap-basket, drew out the eighths of the note, arranged them neatly on his desk into quarters, then into halves, and then into the whole, which he read and read again.

The missive is here published:—

FABIAN PARK, BRISTOL.

MY DEAR JOHN, — Can you arrange to come up and see me to-morrow morning? I have a favour to ask of you, for you are the one person to whom I feel I can readily turn in my present predicament, and I know that for friendship's sake you will be glad to help me.

OLÉA FABIAN.

Greenfield was pleased, so pleased that for once in his life he forgot to be sensible, and the addled moth fluttered in pleasure

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under the star. On the morrow he would see her, and she would let him do a favour for her. It was more than she had done in all the years.

While Greenfield sat thus deep in thought and rejoicing, he heard footsteps and a new voice coming towards his office. Presently the door opened, through which Mr. Mortimer ushered in Crawford Blurdge and Herr Krauber. Surely, until now there never was seen such a trio of rogues in Providence.

"Herr Krauber," said the editor-in-chief, "allow me to present Mr. Greenfield;" and never before had Mortimer's voice seemed so filled with mysterious mischief. Greenfield and the German nodded, Blurdge looking on and listening in evident delight. "Mr. Greenfield," continued Herbert Mortimer, leaning forward and speaking in his inevitable undertone, "Herr Krauber here has a capital good story he's preparing for us, and says it will be ready to-morrow night. In case of my absence from the office you will surely print it, Mr. Greenfield, and make only those changes which may be demanded by our editorial rules."

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The night editor bowed, and the trio left his sanctum. Whereat he thought he was alone, but suddenly there came a muffled mutter close to his ear. "What's up?" quoth the Pup.

"Nothing," replied Greenfield.

"I 'll bet yer there is," returned the sagacious animal.

And, outside, Bluridge and Herbert Mortimer were trying their best to get the story in advance from Krauber. But Krauber gave only the vaguest outline. "For it is better," said he to himself, "always to hold the key to the situation in your own hands until you open the door."

Hitherto revenge had been unsought by Krauber. Now, however, he was on the point of making up for past omissions in this direction,—a privilege that comes with power. When our concentrated efforts have been for wealth, and wealth alone, so long, it is pleasant late in life to enjoy these little recreations.

"I'd give a good deal to know how he will like it," observed Bluridge, starting to leave with Krauber.

"And ten to one," murmured Mortimer,

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"he'd give a good deal to keep it out of print. Gentlemen, good-night."

The words were spoken lightly, and without special import, yet instantly they suggested a far more profitable proceeding than the wager of ten to one. But, as is so frequently the case, it is hard to say whether the idea that came to Mr. Herbert Mortimer was the telepathic cause or only the effect of a similar idea just come to Krauber.

It had hit Krauber so hard (once more to use the unconventional yet eloquent language of our old friend the collegian), so hard that it knocked him clean off the road to revenge back to his previous way, the path to pelf.

He saw a chance of winning back all that he had lost, — a remote one, he confessed ; nevertheless, one worth trying. Mr. Mortimer, too, decided it warranted the attempt, and his sinister spirits arose to an unusual height while he dreamed of success. For the truth is the *Enquirer*, having omnivorously devoured half a dozen fortunes, now lustily called for more.

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Bright and early the next morning Greenfield went to Fabian Park. And even he, with all his lack of the power to observe, saw with surprise and real alarm the change that had come to Oléa. Her face seemed almost emaciated; dark circles showed beneath her eyes; her voice had in it that calm, indescribable, untremulous inflection which comes only after an heroic resignation to an inevitable suffering.

Greenfield thought it would be sensible to say little.

"John," she said, stepping out onto the porch, "thank you for coming. I have some business of importance I wish to transact, and I thought you might be glad to help me."

Greenfield was very glad indeed, and said so. He had always forgotten to reason while with her alone, and there was no sense left in him.

"As you probably know, John," she went on, "your employer, Mr. Mortimer, is, or rather was, the trustee of my father's estate. About two years ago Ray and I came into the money in our own right. Instead of drawing out the principal, how-

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ever, I advocated leaving that in charge of Mr. Mortimer and living on the income as before. Ray agreed, and we have done so until now."

By this time the face of Greenfield had become a study; usually he showed only a phlegmatic mediocrity, but now his bewilderment and interest were evidently unbounded.

"Now, however," continued Oléa, slowly, "I need a very large portion of the principal. I am going to Mr. Mortimer's office for this before noon, and will you go with me?"

Greenfield of course answered in the affirmative. It is a question which was greater,—his perplexity or delight; but we must do him the justice to believe it was the latter.

"Immediately upon receiving the money," resumed Oléa, "I want to know if you will do with it as I direct."

Greenfield assured Oléa of his willingness.

"You are the only man, under the circumstances," she remarked, "with whom I can trust so large a sum."

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Whereat the gladness of Greenfield increased. It is pleasant sometimes to be praised even for those traits the lack of which would make us despicable.

"I will order the carriage," said she, "and we can catch an early train for Providence."

On the way to Providence their talk was at first entirely casual, but Oléa started suddenly when Greenfield asked her if she had met "a queer-looking, stout little German by the name of Krauber." Instantly she became interested, and a close observer might have noticed that the question brought also a look of pain.

"I have heard of him," she answered simply.

"I saw him last night at the office," observed Greenfield. "He must be a friend of Blurdge's, for they came in together. I believe Herr Krauber has some story he is preparing; it is to be printed to-morrow, and Mr. Mortimer is evidently delighted with it."

Then Oléa lost herself in a troubled, apprehensive wondering, and the conversation became casual again.

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Mr. Herbert Mortimer was both pleased and displeased to see Oléa and Greenfield. He was pleased because he had been planning a visit this very day, but he knew it would have seemed too pointed. Therefore her coming to him solved a knotty problem. He was displeased because Greenfield was with her. But he soon surmounted that obstacle.

"Mr. Greenfield," he said presently, "how fortunate it is that you came in! I was this very moment wishing you were here."

Greenfield grumbled.

"Of course I know these are not your office hours, Mr. Greenfield, but the born journalist is always ready. I left a statistical article on Prohibition in your office. It needs editing pretty carefully. The author's figures are better than his language. I am very anxious to have it set up inside of an hour or two."

Thereupon Greenfield doggedly left.

"I came," said Oléa, "on a matter of business relating to the estate."

Mortimer showed no surprise; it was probably some trifle. But he assumed an



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air of abstraction and great anxiety. "You have found me in an unhappy frame of mind," he informed her.

"Why is that, Mr. Mortimer?"

"All on account," replied the editor, "of my friend the marquis."

"What marquis?" she asked quickly.

"Montrecourt," he answered. "You know him, do you not, Miss Fabian?"

"Yes; I have met him," she said, and her patient control of her words and voice was marvellous.

"And there's a German by the name of Krauber mixed up in the affair," continued Herbert Mortimer, in his most sinister undertone. "Hates the marquis, I believe. Evidently some trouble between them. Why, my dear girl, think of it! Here this German came to me last night wanting me to print some slanderous story he claims to have heard abroad,—a scandal about Montrecourt in which of course there is n't a word of truth. 'I'll sell you the story for a thousand dollars,' he said to me. 'It will make a great sensation.'

"'I'd rather give you five thousand to tear it up,' I answered. 'It's a lie.'"

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"And what," rejoined Oléa, "did he say then?" She had immediately seen the greater lie, for Greenfield, as we know, had happened to mention the incident of the night before. She thought of accusing Mr. Herbert Mortimer of the falsehood then and there, — indeed, she had mistrusted him before now, — but the thought that she might bring trouble to Greenfield by so doing caused her to abandon the idea. It was not until Mortimer's next words that she knew his motive.

"He said he would go and have it printed elsewhere," returned the editor, "unless, of course," and here the editor laughed at the utter absurdity of the idea, "unless I paid him the five thousand and another five besides to have the story buried for ever. It was a clear case of blackmail; but, bless me, do you know, Miss Fabian, if I could have paid it I believe I'd have done so. Think of the libel, think of the scandalous publicity, the horrid newspaper sensationalism, the proceedings in court, for of course the marquis would have wished to disprove it all. Why, I believe Montrecourt would not hesitate

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were he here; unfortunately, he's in Chicago at the Great Western Railway office, as perhaps you know."

"Yes; I know," said Oléa.

"I tried to speak to him by telephone," pursued Mortimer, "but he was not in. It is too bad."

"It is indeed too bad," said Oléa. "Do you say that Herr Krauber has the story?" Mr. Mortimer made an affirmative reply.

"And it could not be printed except with his consent?" she queried.

"No; not possibly," declared Mortimer, which he considered a strong card, but in some games aces are merely one-spots.

"Then," she observed quietly, "you may be quite sure, Mr. Mortimer, that our friend is safe, and the story will not be printed."

At this the extreme astonishment of Mr. Herbert Mortimer became evident. "How do you know anything about it?" he asked rather brusquely.

"A bird is born for every woman," answered Oléa, "just to whisper secrets in her ear."

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Mr. Mortimer was abashed by the evasion. At this moment Greenfield returned. "I have stopped work with the editorial blue pencil," he remarked.

"Why?" demanded the chief.

"Because the article is finished."

"With an unusual rapidity," observed Mortimer, and he scowled until his eyebrows met.

Oléa felt pleased that Greenfield was to be present during the next few minutes of her conversation. The value of a witness in a case like this she appreciated from intuition, as we men do from experience.

"I came to ask you for all my share of the principal from the estate; and I should like very much to have it in four cheques of equal amounts immediately."

At first she had intended to ask for only a fourth, but his rascally attempt at blackmail having shown him in his true light, she decided her money was safer in her own hands.

Mr. Mortimer was grieved, deeply grieved and surprised, and he showed it. Fortunately the money was readily available, the trustee being a coward as

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well as a knave. He had all the deviltry of Krauber and Blurdge, and not half of their force to do it justice. Now, a clever bad man may be interesting despite his wickedness, and a bungling good one may be estimable despite his stupidity; but a bungling bad one, being neither entertaining nor righteous, is intolerable.

Therefore let us leave Mr. Herbert Mortimer to his dismal broodings, as Oléa left him when he had come back from negotiating the sale of the necessary bonds.

"I would not have taken it all away," she said to Greenfield, "but I think Mr. Mortimer has changed since my father appointed him."

"An insatiable newspaper is apt to change a man," observed Greenfield, drily. "Do you know, I really believe it sometimes becomes a fever — this new journalism — a kind of vice like gambling. And there's a good deal larger chance for profit in the latter."

But Oléa was not listening. They were now walking towards the principal railway station of Providence, from which

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the electric cars leave bound for the Bristol depot. "The favour I have to ask of you is this," said she, after she had stopped and obtained a cashier's cheque in exchange for the one she carried. "Will you take this," and she handed it to him, "to Herr Krauber, of whom you spoke, and who lives at Newport in the Marquis Montrecourt's apartments? And say this to him in about the same words as I do, without answering a single question. 'I have here,' you must say, 'a cheque for the full payment of the debts of the Marquis Montrecourt. Kindly give me a receipt, releasing the marquis from every single obligation.'"

Greenfield, much mystified, repeated these words at her request. "I will do it," he said.

"And there is one more thing I must ask," she continued, "although of course it is hardly necessary. It is that you will preserve for ever an utter, unquestioning silence regarding this matter,—a silence so complete that you will not even allow your own thoughts to dwell on it. Will you promise?"

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"I promise," he answered.

"I thank you sincerely," she said, and in those words were his whole reward.

"I shall give it to him this evening when he comes to the office," said Greenfield.

"And it is all-important," she returned, "that he should have it before seeing Mr. Mortimer."

"The Marquis Montrecount saved my life," he responded; "there shall be no mistake;" and he meant it. But, alas! unfortunately he erred, as will be shown; and this, like the blunder in the tavern, — yes, and like all the errors of our lives, — has a marked effect on the conclusion.

When Oléa arrived at her home in Bristol, she found waiting for her a round, red-faced man with a smiling manner, and she knew at a glance that he was Krauber.

He introduced himself, while she, bowing with the utmost coldness, remained standing.

"I came to see you," he began, "about a most unfortunate matter."

Oléa's interest became apparent in spite of herself. Perhaps the German was go-

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ing to cancel the debt, or perhaps — and the thought brought back her depression — he had come with bad news of the marquis. She listened silently.

“It is about a friend of mine,” continued Krauber, in downcast voice, “who, I am told, is a friend of yours, too; I know of no one else in this country with whom I can speak regarding a matter of this kind. Well, Miss Fabian, to be very frank and unconventionally candid with you, this gentleman, the Marquis Montrecourt, — you know him, do you not?” and Krauber paused questioningly.

“Yes; you are right; he is a friend of mine,” she answered.

“This gentleman owes me a large sum of money. Now, for my part, of course, although I must confess it has financially embarrassed me somewhat, I am willing to wait in patience. But there is unluckily another creditor who is not so lenient. This is Mr. Herbert Mortimer, who threatens to print some absurd, scandalous story about the marquis unless the money is paid. Do you know, I believe I’d pay it myself, if I could afford to do so. Just



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think of a horrid, sensational story illustrated with libellous caricatures of our friend,—imagine this kind of thing appearing in the papers!”

Oléa shuddered inwardly, closing her eyes as though to shut out the sight of it all; and when she opened them to look him full in the face, marvelling that there were so many and so great knaves in the world, he averted his eyes and hung his lids for once instead of blinking.

“I came to you, Miss Fabian,” he said, with a fruitless endeavour to study her face, for its very goodness blinded him, “because I heard you were among the *Enquirer's* stockholders, and thought you might use your influence in behalf —”

“Please pardon me for interrupting,” she broke in, “but unless you are the Evil One himself the story will not be printed. Good-bye, Herr Krauber; I must leave.”

“But Mademoiselle — Fräulein — stop, wait please, one minute —”

“I must leave you *now*,” repeated Oléa, and she was gone.

And then, sitting in his rooms in Newport, Krauber spent one of those rare

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afternoons in which the subject of his thoughts was something he did not understand.

Late in the evening, however, came a partial enlightenment. He had arrived earlier on the train from Newport in Providence and now walked with the eagerness of revenge towards the newspaper office. But before he arrived there, he was spied by the Pup, who, having been placed in a window like a picket by Greenfield, now hastened to give information of the German's approach. Thereat Greenfield arose and went out with his hand on the cheque in his pocket. "Herr Krauber," said he, "I am intrusted to make you a full payment for all the past obligations of the Marquis Montrecourt. The cheque is here," — and he held it out, — "will you kindly give me a receipt?"

Now, if the heavens had fallen straight onto the bald head of Krauber, his wits would not have been more suddenly scattered. He blinked first at the cheque and then at its holder. The cheque was signed by the bank's cashier, not by Montrecourt; it was in the hands of Greenfield, — Green-

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field, who lived in Bristol and whom Montrecourt had saved from drowning. Greenfield worshipped somebody — ah ! now Krauber began to understand ; this somebody had asked Greenfield to do it for her — the reasons were obvious — well, well, it was a very pleasant turn in the game. Thus Krauber recovered quickly his dispersed wits.

“ I will gladly give you a receipt *for the cheque*,” he said craftily, “ and to-morrow, when I prove beyond all doubt that it is good, I will send Monsieur Montrecourt another receipt with a full release from all his obligations.”

“ That is all I can ask,” assented Greenfield, for it seemed reasonable enough, but this is the very blunder which affects the conclusion.

“ I have decided not to print the story, Mr. Mortimer,” observed Krauber, entering the editor’s sanctum, “ and circumstances compel me to withhold all particulars.” And as he said this Krauber understood the meaning of Oléa Fabian’s words, — “ unless you are the Evil One himself.”

Mortimer showed plainly his chagrin ;

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and as the German remained stolidly unwavering, the two parted with none too friendly a farewell. Thus a pair of rogues were divided against themselves, but it mattered little; they needed no further agreement, for so far as the present recorder knows this was their final meeting. If from this, however, we are led to believe that the imp of the scandalous story was then and there for ever imprisoned, we see no further than our noses.

"I have heard from Herr Krauber," asserted Crawford Bluridge to Mortimer later in the evening, "that certain satisfactory settlements have caused him to withdraw the news."

"True enough," grumbled Mortimer; "but you look actually pleased over it. I thought you were against the marquis, what the devil's changed you?"

"I look pleased," began Bluridge, and his eyes bulged with an ill-contained delight, "not because the story is lost, but because another and even better is found."

"About the same person?" queried Mortimer.

"The same person," answered Bluridge.

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"How on earth did you get facts enough to print?" asked Mortimer, his spirits rising, and an unmistakable admiration showing in his eye. For the dunce in the school of deviltry looks up to the dabster, and it is so too in the school of goodness; therefore we are like little boys in the primaries, having an envious admiration for our fellows in the form ahead, it matters not whether they be to the right or left, so long as they be in our own line of progress.

"I got the story direct from Paris," declared Blurdge, proudly. "I wrote to a friend whose answer arrived this very morning. I made an incentive for him, and he has succeeded. He first found the man, — the one man besides Krauber and Montrecourt who knew, — and then, bless you! he went and showered on the fellow full payments of Montrecourt's debts, with the dickens knows how much interest, just to get the story out of him."

"And, I suppose," broke in Mr. Mortimer, with a kind of embalmed smile, "that the Frenchman, being so deuced polite and generous, felt it was n't half fair to take so much and give nothing in exchange."

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"Precisely," returned Blurdge, "so he swapped the facts for the francs." Which remark shows that Mr. Crawford Blurdge was far more apt than elegant.

"We will print it, then," declared Mortimer, with a dry wrinkling of his face, betraying pleasure.

But when they came to Greenfield with it late at night, he refused point-blank to edit it. Said he drily, and it was hard: "Not if you discharge me. I know well enough, although his name is n't actually down there, that this man saved my life."

Which speech, had there been a top gallery, would have caused a whistling, and truly there was heroism in it.

"No journalist is indispensable," observed Herbert Mortimer.

So Greenfield left; but the very next day he had a better position on another newspaper, — probably more on account of his common sense than as a reward for his virtue. For mundanity ever thrives, and poetry starves. And soon, when his thriving became certain, Greenfield decided that the star must go, for he had come slowly to a patient understanding of that

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mission she had given to him ; besides, a wife is part of prosperity, thought he, and, thinking thus, he took one unto himself. And so they were married, he and Adele, — he, because it was sensible ; she (as she often told her grandmother with whom she lived for ever after), “just because we were.”

But this was long after the publication of the story, to which we must return.

There is no need of a reprint here, for we may readily find it in the *Enquirer* files, or for that matter in the back numbers of many another journal the country over. For although the *Enquirer* may boast of the “scoop,” the story was republished again and again, with exaggerations, editorials, and numerous verses, quips, and caricatures. And while the *Enquirer*, to avoid all chance of libel, used no names, but couched its titbit in carefully guarded language, other newspapers, gaining in the boldness which comes with repetition, showed no hesitancy in using the name and face of the marquis to create a social and comic commotion.

It was a veritable feast for starving dog-

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gerel-makers and moralists. I believe even the clergy mentioned it in their pulpits. A leading essayist chose it for the subject of an article in a foremost ethical magazine. Hot-headed jingoes found it gave them an excellent opportunity to vent their spleen on foreigners,—indeed, the whole narrative had soon become proverbial, and there are phrases of slang and witty maxims common in use to-day which derived their origin directly from “the story of Montrecourt.” The climax was reached when the *Sun* of New York, showing its usual cleverness, devoted a couple of columns in a Sunday issue to supposed interviews with prominent financiers both here and abroad, giving their opinions concerning the effect of the Matrimonial Syndicate’s failure, the consequent depression in this line of business, and the hopeless fall in titles resulting from the exposure in America of the Syndicate’s methods. There was also a leader in the same paper, purporting to be by the financial editor, which said, in conclusion: “In fine, if the nobility market is ever again to recover from this serious slump, confidence must



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be restored. We hear from our correspondents that there is little money to loan abroad for investments of this kind ; but this feeling of uncertainty will soon disappear when foreigners realise that we are still ready to purchase, and that a single failure does not ruin an entire line of trade. The graver condition, we repeat, is on this side of the water ; for here the bottom is entirely knocked out of all titular stock. A healthy recovery can only come by a gradual renewal of confidence, although if the Krauber clique attempts to corner the entire foreign market, as is reported, and succeeds, prices will be forced up until dividends are paid again. Then it is safe to say the banks will resume their recognition of noblemen as collateral securities."

After this the wits and the wags desisted, for they were outdone ; and people began to stop talking about the Title-mongers of Paris. Then humour on the subject came only from the collection of antique, threadbare jokes, and probably these specimens will be found throughout all the coming years of the earth.

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But now that we have observed the effect of the published story on the world in general, let us go back to its results in the lives of individuals, for it is these that concern us most.

Soon after the head-lines came to the world for a breakfast relish that fatal morning, Mr. Crawford Blurdge hastened to the home of Miss Flub to claim his reward.

She read it; and, to do her justice, her heart was not so flinty or degenerate, unless we mean fatty degeneration, that it did not soften somewhat at thought of Montrecourt's disgrace. Immediately she hardened it again, however, by recalling her own disgrace that day on the *Shoo-fly*.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to," she observed rather sourly, and Blurdge knew that these — these were the words whereby she was made his very own.


Which is the greatest punishment of the next to the greatest villain.

And it serves him right.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN WHICH THE LAST PAYMENT OF THE PENALTY IS BEGUN

MRS. FLUB, on hearing of Sappho's engagement, spent the night in tears and loneliness, — tears, because Blurdge was "such an awful come-down" from Montrecourt; loneliness, because Mr. Flub had not yet returned from Chicago. She sent him a telegram telling the news, in the morning. Oh, what a different dispatch it was from that last she had sent in those happy days but just gone by, when she had believed her darling Sappho was soon to be "the Markeese de Somebody-or-other"! Oh, the bitterness of gall in this engagement; oh, the rash step; oh, the unhappiness it brought her poor sensitive, sentimental soul! Her soul, however, although very affecting, was not half so affected or effective as her husband. Mr. Flub showed plainly that he was *affected*, by a single big oath, hurled gutturally from under his



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coarse moustache, causing even the accustomed office boy to tremble and seek a hiding-place. Mr. Flub showed that he was *effective*, by sending this same office boy with a message for the second Assistant Secretary, demanding that gentleman's immediate presence.

Montrecourt came into the room. The last trace of his nonchalant, indifferent expression had gone, giving place to a look of unconquerable pain under the doom of an everlasting despair. His face was haggard; the lines had deepened; his step had lost its elasticity. For he had read the fatal *Enquirer*, kindly sent to him by some one in Providence (though he knew not that there was so much enmity on earth); and although the thought of his own interminable degradation by this story brought him bitterness, the overpowering feverish realisation of the unhappiness it must give her cursed him. His suffering was superlative; he felt as though remorse were gnawing the roots of his brain and his heart away. Ah, that he might be given a chance to kill the man who had written it! Heaven give him vengeance, death, an

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awakening from his damnable dream ; give him the courage to live or the weakness to die ! “ Dear God, a salvation,” he cried within himself, “ one single drop from the fountain of Heaven for the thirst of this entire Hell ! ” Then his heart having grown suddenly hard and cold within him, he sat a silent watcher by the seeming death-bed of his feelings, yet they lingered on lethargically, and he knew not whether to wish them well or ill, so he left them to God, whom through these very feelings he had come to know. And they lived, for it is not in the heart of God to kill the heart of man.

After Montrecourt came into the room he stood motionless, with arms folded, head bent slightly forward, eyes fixed on the President.

“ Remain outside,” Flub commanded the office boy, who left and did so — very near the keyhole. This is what he heard : —

“ I have the pleasure of announcing, markeese, if you ain’t already heard it, the engagement of my daughter to Mr. Crawford Blurdge.”

“ My congratulations, Mr. Flub.”

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Then for a few seconds there was a silence, in which the office boy put an eye where an ear had been, and saw the face of Flub growing redder.

"Devil take you, you foxy Frenchman!" he began; "I see your game. I ain't a fool, — not by a damn sight. You make love to my daughter and get engaged to her, just so I'll give you a position. Pretty clever, ain't it, Montrecourt?"

For an instant the lips of the marquis parted to answer, then he pursed them all the tighter and withheld it.

"I took a lot of pleasure," continued Flub, a kind of regretful sorrow brewing with his anger, "in working it so you'd get in here. I had little Dangle nominate you, and it's the first time I've pushed a feller through so quick." Then evidently the rage brewed quicker than the sorrow, for Flub tugged at his collar as though it were choking him. By this time the marquis saw all too clearly the truth: Dangle had lied — ah, the pity of it; and in that moment there came to Montrecourt, with all its crushing force, the hopeless feeling that he was no longer a free man.

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"I shall send in my resignation to-morrow," he said quietly, thereupon starting for the door, despite the vindictive remarks of Flub.

"Look here," roared the latter; "damn you, it was a scoundrelly trick, eh? Come now, own up."

At this Montrecourt's blood went up, and he turned back.

"I demand an apology," said he, quickly.

"Devil a one you 'll get," declared Flub; "and if you come a step nearer," observing with fear the other's sudden approach, "I 'll push this burglar alarm button on my desk."

Montrecourt stood looking at the President with an infinite scorn. "From a gentleman," he observed, showing matchless dignity, "this last would be the greater insult; from one of the *canaille* it is the barking of a dog."

Then he left the room, while the office boy hurried excitedly from the keyhole.

"I suppose I must put Bluridge in that feller's place," said Flub to himself later, when his wrath had cooled. And this for Crawford Bluridge was another punishment; for who among all the subordi-

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nates of Flub will call their employment pleasure ?

The Marquis Montrecourt immediately made arrangements to leave for Newport with the intention of seeing Krauber there, and telling the German of his present inability to pay even the interest. Then once more he would take on the yoke of the Title-mongers. It was just as well, he told himself, the last ray of any hope had gone from his life. He had put off the evil day long enough ; he would now accept the inevitable and at least put away all chance of further disappointment.

But even as he came to this decision, on the day before his departure he received a brief letter from Krauber, saying : —

MY DEAR MARQUIS, — I have received your payment in full in settlement of all past obligations, including money for your debt to Rolierre which I am remitting him by this mail. Now I know that I was right ; you are a wonderful joker.

With thanks for your cheque and humble apologies for my anger, due entirely to a misunderstanding,

Yours gratefully,

KRAUBER.



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Being at a loss to comprehend the situation, yet with the vague feeling of a new torment whispering the truth to him, Montrecourt went to Newport. On arriving there, however, he found his apartments closed and uninhabited. Krauber, accompanied by Pierre, had left for Paris.

It was late in the afternoon, and, Newport being deserted, Montrecourt felt more keenly than ever his utter loneliness in the world. He knew of no man he could really call his friend, and the one woman — ah, well, he might at least be near her. On consulting a time table, he found that he might take a train as far as Warren, but no further. The last train of the day connecting with another for Bristol had gone. But the four-mile walk from Warren seemed a trifle. So he went there, and arriving at seven o'clock he dined at the Warren Hotel, which is patronised more from necessity than choice. And after dining the marquis started out on his walk to Bristol.

This is how it came about that at nine o'clock, or thereabouts, four people sat in the Green Tavern, — Montrecourt, because

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he had been there once before; Crawford Blurdge, because he probably would never be there again, thanks to his marriage on the morrow; Lemuel Johnson, because he was never anywhere else; and Nibbles for the same reason.

The marquis sat at a table in the corner near the stove alone, until Nibbles came near and looked up whining, as though to offer solace. Montrecourt stroked the dog's head. Blurdge sat in another corner, and Lemuel stood beside him talking, his back against the wall. Blurdge and the Frenchman had exchanged only conventional greetings. The bluish eyes of Blurdge dilated with a look of intense hatred. He held a newspaper in one hand, from which he had evidently been reading aloud before Montrecourt's intrusion, and a beer mug in the other. He tipped his chair back, and seemed pleased with what he had been reading, for he pointed out, with an expression of apparent pride and amusement, certain passages and pictures to Lemuel. He betrayed annoyance at having had his reading and conversation cut short by the intruder.

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Suddenly he was astonished to see the marquis come over to him, and, with never a word, lean slightly forward to inspect a patch near the ankle on a leg of Blurdge's trousers. They were very old ones, for he was saving his new clothes for the honeymoon, after the usual manner of bridegrooms.

The inspection evidently brought as much satisfaction to Montrecourt as amazement to Blurdge.

"I remember reading," said the marquis, leisurely, "an interesting anecdote at the beginning of a story which I believe is fast becoming famous. The story was about a Parisian sent to America by a French Syndicate for the purpose of marrying an heiress and dividing the spoils among his creditors. The anecdote told of how the first suspicion had come to be cast upon the gentleman from Paris."

"I remember," rejoined Blurdge, endeavouring to hide his pleasure at thought of it.

"It told," resumed the marquis, after refusing the offer of a chair at Blurdge's table, "of how one night in this very Green Tavern a cable dispatch was written by the

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nobleman, mentioning goods for sale, which, the narrative declared, of course, meant nothing more nor less than himself."

"And I suppose the narrative was right," observed Bluridge, smiling at his beer.

"Yes," returned Montrecourt, slowly, and he held Bluridge's eyes fast fixed by the gaze of his own. "Yes; for the listener's ears were as sharp as the teeth of the dog. Is it not so?"

Bluridge guffawed. "Ask the listener," said he.

"I am doing so," rejoined Montrecourt. "For some time I kept a little piece of cloth, the pattern of which I fortunately remember;" and he looked once more intently at the trouser-leg. Lemuel Johnson stood near in open-mouthed surprise, but half understanding; Nibbles, the leading witness for the plaintiff, sniffled interestedly near the ankles of the defendant. "Of course it is probably mere chance," remarked the marquis, with a pensive air; "yet I wonder if he recognises them."

Bluridge laughed, but with less mirth and more fear than at first. His bravado covered cowardice.

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"What 's the object ? " he asked.

"Of what ? " queried Montrecourt.

"Your chaff."

"I shall take pleasure in showing you ;" whereat the Frenchman came a step or two nearer and looked down steadily at Bluridge. One towered, the other cowered ; there was no question as to which would have been the conqueror in any contest. In an instant Montrecourt had seen, by his keen deductive reasoning and perception, the whole outline of the truth. There was cause for Bluridge's enmity, and the cause was Sappho Flub ; there was fruit of jealousy, and the fruit was the published story. It was all plain as day.

"I have been wondering," began Montrecourt, with the utmost calmness, after a somewhat awkward pause, "whether you will mind adding your signature to the story ; surely the author of so noted and meritorious a production should not remain shrouded in anonymous obscurity."

Bluridge squirmed. "Well, what if I did write the story ? " he queried, changing his tactics. "You deserve a hundred of

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them, and worse ones." At which Bluridge arose, in order that he might come somewhere near to the height of Montrecourt. For the Frenchman had never seemed to him so stalwart or possessed of so great a power.

"That is neither here nor there," responded the marquis; "I was speaking of your signature."

"Oh, go to the devil!" said Bluridge, making for the door. "Here's your pay, Lemuel;" and he tossed a couple of coins onto the table.


But Montrecourt blocked the way. "Your impatience," said he, "shows me that I must come quicker to my point. Well, then, I demand a card from you for publication to-morrow morning, saying: 'I first ferreted out the facts and carefully prepared the story concerning the Marquis D'Aubigné Montrecourt. Signed: Crawford Bluridge.' This, you see," continued the Frenchman, slowly and thoughtfully repeating the announcement, "is entirely just, for it is entirely the truth."

"Why do you ask for such damn foolishness?" queried Bluridge; and by his

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hesitating, unconvincing manner, Montre-court knew the cunning had clean gone out of him.

“ I do not call it that,” said the marquis, calmly, still standing between Blurdge and the door; “ but if you wish to know the reason it is this: an interesting question presents itself to my mind. I am wondering whether the publication of your name as the author of the little history will place you in the public eye as a hero or a wretch. I cannot foresee positively whether men will honour you or despise you. From your own point of view, you will surely predict the former; judging from your assertion that the French gentleman deserves even more than you have given him, you will therefore, of course, make no objection. It is well to consider, however, before taking this ground conclusively, that the world regards a hangman with an unmerciful contempt. Yet the hangman metes out the very justice decreed by the judges we honour. This, Mr. Blurdge, arises from a sentiment not easily explained; and a little pet theory of mine, or rather, I may say a firm conviction, tells me that the senti-



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ment will be the same in your case. It is an interesting experiment, you must allow."

At the beginning of this, Blurdge had shrunk back to his chair, in which he remained seated, with his eyes doggedly on the rough timbers of the floor. At the finish, however, he arose again quickly.

"Lemuel," said he, "stand by me;" and the tavern-keeper came half-reluctantly to his side. Altercations were not in his policy.

Blurdge made a rush with clenched fists for Montrecourt and the door. The Frenchman quickly held his hands at his back and stood with head erect and chest expanded, full ready for the other's blow. There was neither offence nor defence in his attitude. Few men will strike under this condition. It requires a colder courage than in the face of certain defeat.

Blurdge, being momentarily abashed, dealt no blow. In another minute, however, he had recovered himself. Whereon he threw himself forward and upward, claspng the Frenchman about the neck as though for a wrestling match. At the



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same time he called for Lemuel to assist him. Then Johnson, evidently having decided that friendship demanded an act of this kind, stepped forward to join in the affray. Nibbles ran around the three men, barking loudly.

"Mr. Johnson," said Montrecourt, holding little Bluridge quite off the floor and never budging an inch, "I do not know whether you understand the situation. This gentleman, now leaning on my shoulders for support, is the one who, while hiding in the back room, so kindly caressed your dog with his foot. The patch in his trousers tells the tale, and there is no denying it. I have kept the torn bit of cloth that matches this material to a nicety."

Lemuel fell back instantly.

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed; and this time loss of breath and strength had caused Bluridge to release his hold.

"It is true," continued the marquis; "but do not let it affect your position in the present disagreement. If you join in the attack, I shall be glad to assume the defensive, for then the sides will be even.

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Towards single-handed Mr. Bluridge I feel differently."

But Lemuel showed no intention of further participation in the hostilities. "The man that hits my dog," said he, returning to the bar, "is no longer my friend, eh, Nibbles? If you wasn't a cur, you'd be a thoroughbred, isn't it so?"

"Will you let me go, or not?" queried Bluridge, with a sullen surrender. "You are the stronger."

"That matters little," rejoined Montre-court; "you have not the courage to prove it. Yes; I shall gladly let you go, Mr. Bluridge, after you have sent to the *Enquirer* the message I have dictated."

"There is no way of sending it to-night," declared Bluridge, with a faint hopefulness.

"By telephone," returned the marquis. "I suppose you have one here, Mr. Johnson."

"Yes; nearly every house in Rhode Island has a telephone," responded Lemuel.

"Mr. Bluridge, call up the office, then,"

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commanded Montrecourt; and instantly there came to Bluridge's face the old look of crafty scheming. He showed a surprising willingness. The Frenchman poured out another glass of wine. Bluridge went to the telephone and rang the bell.

"Hello, hello! Is this Central?" said he, after waiting several seconds for an answer to the ring. "I want eleven-seventy-one. Hello!" (after another brief pause). "Is this the *Enquirer* office? Oh, it's you, Mr. Mortimer. Well, I want to have a card inserted, saying —"

"I have ferreted out," dictated Montrecourt.

"I have ferreted out," echoed Bluridge, wincing very obviously.

"All the facts," pursued Montrecourt, "about the Frenchman employed by the Parisian Syndicate, and am to be thanked for the entire story."

Bluridge repeated the dictation word for word. "Will it appear in to-morrow's paper?" he asked.

"Signed with my name," added the marquis.

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"I want it signed with my name," declared Bluridge, before the wire. "Much obliged, Mr. Mortimer; good-night;" and he rang the bell for a disconnection.

"I hope that suits you," said he, insolently, "and now I shall go."

"Please wait one minute," observed Montrecourt, putting down his glass and coming to the telephone himself. "I was a trifle careless."

Then this is what Bluridge heard, and hearing it he considered the advisability of making a dash for the door, but his better judgment showed him the utter uselessness of such a move.

Montrecourt rang the bell. "Central" answered immediately, and the Frenchman thought he knew why Bluridge had waited so long. "Is this the *Enquirer* office?" queried Montrecourt. "Who — hello! — who is it? The Pup — who's the Pup? Oh, the office boy — please tell Mr. Mortimer that some one wishes to speak to him. Hello!" (after a few minutes of waiting) "is that you, Mr. Mortimer? I just wanted to ask if you fully understood Mr. Bluridge's message — what do you say? —

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didn't get any message—how extraordinary!—there must be some mistake—well, I'll give it to you for him. He wants to have printed in to-morrow's paper the following card: 'I have ferreted out' (hello, hello! do you hear me? All right), 'have ferreted out all the facts about the Frenchman employed by the Parisian Syndicate' (hello! can you make it? Yes: that's it), 'and am to be thanked for the entire story.' He wants it to be signed Crawford Bluridge. Hello! what—on considering it, you—what? I can't quite hear—you will not print it, unless—" Then Montrecourt turned to Bluridge, who looked up savagely from another mug of beer. "Mr. Mortimer will not print it," said the marquis, "unless the message comes directly from you; and it must be paid for as an advertisement. So I shall be pleased if you will come here—it really is too bad to trouble you so much—and give it again yourself. In the meantime perhaps I'd better hold the wire, to hear the replies; you don't object, of course."

So Bluridge repeated the announcement.

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"You might add," observed the marquis while they were still at the telephone, "that you will pay extra to have it on the front page."

"I will pay extra to have it on the front page," said Bluridge, with sullen obedience.

"And now the possibility of your cancelling this order occurs to me," remarked Montrecourt, thoughtfully, at which the last ray of hope left Bluridge's face. "Will you therefore kindly write it out and sign it? Then if it fails to appear, I can have it printed here or elsewhere at any time."

"Curse you!" muttered Bluridge, and he wrote it.

"And will you witness the signature, Mr. Johnson?"

"Yes," observed Lemuel, willingly, for his anger had not yet cooled; "he kicked my dog."

"And now good-night, gentlemen," said Montrecourt, after it was written and witnessed. "I am much obliged to both of you." Then he left.

"There's one thing certain," called Bluridge, running after him, "I have never

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let a woman pay my debts." And he disappeared into the darkness.

The blow told.

"It must be so;" and Montrecourt could no longer keep away the dreaded truth. "It must be so." He knew it, he knew that she had done it—for his sake, and yet it was the greatest of his punishments.

He walked to Bristol. Despite the depth of his despair and the realisation of his utter unworthiness, Montrecourt once more climbed the hill that led to her home. A minute, a last brief minute, near her, in the very air she breathed, on the very ground she trod, and then he would go for ever. It was to be his final, unheard farewell to her world above him; for even in his walk from the tavern he had determined fully and positively on the course to be followed.

He came near to the gate behind the house, through which she had come out to him that night near the white cross. He went to the low tree beneath her window and broke a small twig with two or three yellow leaves on it. "They are the call-boys for winter on the stage of the sea-

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sons," he thought. "Autumn bids good-bye, too."

And then, as if it came softly, beseechingly, tenderly, in the voice of an angel from the sky of stars above him, he heard his name whispered, and looked up.

But, seeing no one, he drew back from the light of the windows. Then his ears caught the rustle of leaves, and a light step causing him to turn. He saw her coming to him. And the look of sorrow, the expression in her eyes of an infinite suffering, the faint shadow of lines in her face, increased his love then an hundred fold, for in these there is more power than all the beauty in the world.

"I had hardly dared to hope," she said. He made no step towards her, only for one second he held her hand lightly.

"I had not meant that we should see each other," he replied ; "but come and we will walk to the shore. It is too cold for you to stand here. And I ask you once more, in the name of our love, to oppose me in nothing I tell you now."

She put her arm in his own, and made no answer. The joy of being with him once



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more robbed her of realisation and dimmed her sadness.

“Oléa, you have—and, O God, that I might less certainly know the truth!—you have punished me almost as I have deserved, and I cannot put it more strongly, for my sin has been so great.”

“What do you mean, dear? Tell me how much you know.”

“All, for the receipt came to me; the money could have been only yours; and I have heard from another.”

“I feared there might be some mistake,” she answered, clinging to his arm the tighter. “But you will not leave me; I say you must not.” And she grew suddenly imperious.

“For many reasons it must be so,” he said slowly; and all the power that was in him went to restrain her feelings and his own. They were now at the shore, with only the eyes of the night looking down to see them, with only the voice of the breeze and the waters to mingle with their words.

“Your fortune is one gulf, as I have told you; my dishonour is another, and as im-

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passable as both of these, dear Oléa, is the whole world's knowledge of that dishonour."

"No, no," she said, pleading, demanding, grasping his hands fast in her own; "I will not have it so."

"Ah, dearest one," he said in a voice that was low and almost faltering, "I know you would marry me; I know that your love allows no hindrance; but what I tell you now must be, — must be, Oléa, as surely as there is a God in Heaven to witness my oath to it. It is the demand of my duty, of my love, of my whole soul's conception of the right. I must leave you. Were I seen with you even as a friend the stigma would reach to you, my dishonour would become your dishonour, your name would be in the papers of the world, your name on every tongue of ridicule and slander. God forbids so great a shame —"

"Dear," she broke in, and the look of one who dies unsaved came into her eyes, "I beg —"

"Stop, I ask you," he said, compelling her to silence with all the might of his influence. "Ah, do not test my strength further! Tell me, tell me, for I will leave

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then the decision to you, I ask you whether I must stay or go. But there is no question as to your answer. You are honour, you are truth, conscience, goodness, justice, mercy,—in the voice of all these together, Oléa, tell me, may I stay?"

She had dreaded this more than all else that would come to her. There was no stifling the answer within herself. Her lips, from the desperate wish to keep him, from the overwhelming, appalling sadness at thought of separation, held it back an instant, then it came, as he knew it would, for he had begun to know her.

She released her hold of his hands, and stepping backward, bowed her head as if in prayer for mercy. "You must go," she said.

And they turned, slowly retracing their steps to the house.

"But sometime you may come back," she whispered; "yes; you may, you will, come back."

"If I am ever rich, if the stigma ever passes, if the penalty and the debt are fully paid, I shall come back. The penalty must

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not be paid with the supreme sorrow of a moment, as it was in that instant when first you said you loved me, and again when first the story was given to the world, and once more when I knew that you had paid the debt; but it must be paid with the suffering, the toil and hopelessness of years. And this is the decree of God, for He names *my fortune* as the only passport to our union. The world cannot point the finger of scorn when I am rich; scorn is not for free men, and none can find sordid motives in me. It is the only way."

They were now at the door, and for one last minute Oléa stood on the threshold, her hand upon his shoulder.

"It must be soon," she said bravely; but the trial was far too great for other words.

"It cannot be for ever," he returned, and in all tenderness kissing her hand, he left.

Early in the winter the Countess Duval, to maintain her reputation as an epicure and for the purpose of weaving and receiving gossip, gave many excellent dinners in her Parisian apartments. At one of these

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mention was made of an absent friend. As a titbit, it was reserved by the hostess until the last.

"Have you heard the latest story about Montrecourt?" she whispered to her neighbour, yet she knew in an instant it would be the topic. For there is no surer way to make conversation general than by the timely use of a deft whisper.

"No, no; tell me," said the neighbour.

"Is there a new Syndicate?" asked another.

"Title on the market again?" queried a third; and the countess laughed, half sorrowfully, half spitefully, for she had lost this Marquis Montrecourt beyond all hope of recovery.

"No," she returned; "but just imagine. Since his return to Paris several weeks ago the marquis has been looking for a position, actually requesting people to give him a clerkship. The marquis a clerk — think of it!"

"How utterly absurd! I can't believe it," said several.

"And they say he has become a quixotic fool," pursued the countess, "sees no one,

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does nothing, no baccarat, no wine, lives like a miser, spends all his time trying to make money. Do you know, I really believe he is becoming a veritable old money-grubber like Krauber. Was there ever such a transformation?"

"Never, never!" they all declared, looking at one another in surprise; "but tell us more about it."

"Of course for some time no one would think of employing him," resumed the countess, pleased at the evident relish of her savoury morsel. "No one would employ him. First, they all thought he was joking, and laughed at him; but when they found he was serious, they turned their backs on him. What did he know about business, anyway? So utterly inexperienced, you see."

"Except perhaps in the matrimonial line," broke in some one; and they all laughed.

"Finally, however, two or three days ago," continued the countess, draining her glass, "and I can't understand how it came about, he was elected an officer of some South African diamond mining company,

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in which Rolierre, I believe, is a large stockholder."

"Who on earth would have expected it?" remarked several.

"And he is now down in South Africa managing the mine."

"How funny it does seem!" exclaimed others. "Imagine Montrecourt with a pickaxe."

"Among a tribe of Kaffirs," added the countess. "But funnier still is the fact that from the very day he began work there, the price of the stock has risen."

"Then it will probably be worth more than the Syndicate," observed a guest. "But the work must be very hard for him."

"Very hard, indeed," they all said commiseratingly.

Later in the evening, when two of the guests were driving to their home, the wife, who had formerly been Madame La Vie, and was now Mrs. Fabian, questioned her husband on a matter of finance.

"Ray," said she, and she looked bewitching (which was the very way she had won him), "do you remember they spoke of

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that Kaffir diamond mine stock at dinner? Why have you been buying such a lot of it?"

"To force the price up," he replied.

"And you intend soon to sell out, I suppose," she observed in a pleasant murmur. "At the top notch. Dear me! how rich we shall be!"

"No," he declared; "I am doing it to give another stockholder that opportunity."

Madame Fabian looked less pleased. "*Mon Dieu!* what do you mean?" she queried.

"That I owe a member of the company the humblest sort of an apology, and this is the way I am apologising, which is all I can tell you, dear—unless you demand more."

"No, dear, of course not," she responded. It was the best policy; she had secrets of her own. "Tell me," she said presently, and it showed well enough where her thoughts had been, "did you have anything to do with getting Montrecourt his position? It is being whispered that you arranged the matter with Rolierre."



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Ray Fabian laughed and kissed her. "You ask too many questions," he declared, patting her glove. Whereat she decided to let the matter rest for the present.

At the beginning of each month, with unfailing regularity, a long envelope is brought by mail to Oléa Fabian. Her name and address are in the writing of Montrecourt, but the postmark is that of Paris.

"Ray, do you know his address?" she once wrote to her brother.

"Yes; for I forward his letters to you," came the answer, "but I am pledged on my honour to secrecy."

"Ah, dear one," she has said over and over again to herself, "I would come to you if I knew."

In the envelope there is always a remittance, and sometimes she finds a scrap of paper, on which is written, "This is one more step towards the goal."

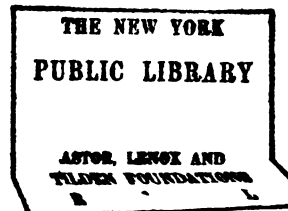
Thus the years pass, while he suffers for his own sin, which is the inexorable law of Heaven, and she suffers for him, which is the law of true love's unity. For patience,

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dwelling on the present or on the long stretch of cheerless years to come, brings infinite dull enduring pain, yet if with hope and love for a double span it bridges all these years, knowing no to-day, but only some far-off glorious to-morrow, then it conquers time. The laurel, when men have won this victory, is a silent, certain happiness with peace greater than the pain.

And so with the bond of their love holding Montrecourt and Oléa across the distance fast to the other and both across the years to the glorious to-morrow, stronger than the moon's yoke-chain on the tide, these two are waiting.

And knowing that there is kindness even in the severest punishment of God, they build their bridge with the double span.









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